

BEADLE'S

HALF DIME Library

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Vol. III.

Single
Number.

BEADLE AND ADAMS, PUBLISHERS,
No. 26 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Price,
5 Cents.

No. 57.

Deadwood Dick's Eagles; OR, THE PARDS OF FLOOD BAR.

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"BUFFALO BEN," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I. FLOOD BAR.

The spring rainy season had set in in the Black Hills country—that dull, monotonous period which every miner dreads next to an attack from the Indian marauders, for there is no working with comfort in the chill, drenching rains that are peculiar to that wild, rough country of gold.

Miners' faces grow clouded upon the clouding of the sky, and if you are in search of long faces, and "pilgrims" who are beset with the bluest order of "blues," look down into camp on one of those monotonously dull, wet days, and you will certainly be "enraptured," for you have found more than the acme of your expectations.

Outside, is the gray, sodden sky, from which the rain falls with an ease and steadiness which is provoking in itself; the rain-soaked earth; the roaring, rushing mountain streams swelled into great torrents; and the grim, rough landscape, so lonely and cheerless on such days as these.

Within the rude log-cabins you will find a dozen or more miners, gathered disconsolately about a crackling hickory fire, listening to the ceaseless pouring of the rain, or mayhap one of their number enlivens things by spinning a yarn.

At Flood Bar, the new Golden Egg of the Black Hills, the rainy season was in its second week, and the miners were naturally not in over-jubilant spirits. In the aforesaid time very little work had been accomplished; indeed, but a few days of paying work had yet been accomplished at the Bar, by the five individuals who composed the population.

Flood Bar is in the north-western portion of the Black Hills, where Professor Jenny failed to find the least signs of gold, but it is not the purpose of the author, because of certain reasons, to give the exact location of the, thus far, greatest mine in the country of gold. This narrative is to be of Flood Bar and the Flood Bar-ites.

The place in question comprises a bar, or neck of land, running into a turbid, rushing mountain stream—a bar of sandy land of no great size, yet so richly impregnated with gold as to be indeed a "Bonanza."

From down a wild, unexplored gorge or ravine, pour the waters of this stream, known as Squirrel Creek, and sweeping majestically past Flood Bar, roars on down a

dark, narrow canyon into the depths of the mountains, where it branches into numberless tributaries.

The five persons, who at the introduction of our story, populated Flood Bar, were named respectively—James Belmont, Old Buzzard, Squirrel Sam, Hooper Vandegrift, and Miaco Rullon.

Belmont was a Virginian, of some forty years of age, and a quiet, retiring fellow, whom everybody liked. He was a thorough-going miner, a good shot, and when once "riled," a rough customer to handle.

Old Buzzard was a stumpy, wrinkled old plainsman, and a good hand at yarn-spinning. It was a part of his business to keep a scout about the Bar, and supply the camp with meat. He was the discoverer of Flood Bar; the remaining part of the "population" had straggled in, one by one.

Squirrel Sam was the eccentric man of the lot. *He never spoke!*

This did not signify that he was a mule, for he had been heard singing, at a distance, several times, which was evidence to the four remaining "pards" that he was not dumb.

But, it became a mystery, when, after unmention-

able efforts, they were obliged to recollect that they had never been able to draw a word from him. What his secret was—why he refused to use his tongue, was a problem that none could solve.

He was a stalwart, handsome fellow, of one-and-twenty, judging from his looks, with a bold, countenanced face, eyes of brown that never quailed beneath the strongest glance, and hair light and curling. His form was supple and muscular, and he ever went armed and ready for combat. A skillful miner he was, and, moreover, a dead-shot, for on several occasions, when vagabond reds had attacked the Bar, right gallantly had he shown his prowess.

Hooper Vandegrift was another eccentric. A very pious sort of an old gent of the very Quakeriest persuasion he appeared, and was the cause of much amusement among the five pards.

Miaco was a dwarf who had one morning been found floating down the creek, bound in a skiff of birch. He had been liberated, and as he had drifted into the secret was offered a home at Flood Bar. But, nothing relating to his past, or where he came from, could be coaxed out of him.

Thus you have the "pards" presented, in brief; in the future we propose to make their better acquaintance.

The pards each occupied a separate marquee, which had been purchased from a band of roving Sioux, who had no doubt stolen them from some of the soldiers stationed in the Black Hills. But each evening they generally assembled in Miaco's tent, for a chat and a smoke.

Buzzard was absent to-night—a wild, tempestuous night, with pouring rain and crashing thunder, and only four of the pards sat hugging the fire in the dwarf's tent. Hooper Vandegrift was ensconced upon a log, with his pipe in his mouth, watching the fire, grimly.

The others were grouped around carelessly. Squirrel Sam reading hard at a yellow-covered novel which he had somewhere run across.

"It's queer what has caused Old Buzzard to stay so long," commented James Belmont, as he finished scouring up his rusty sheath-knife. "His grim old face must have frightened off all the game to-day, or else something has happened to him!"

"Reckon he take care of himself," put in Miaco, yawning. "He's smart old rooster, with an eye on every side for danger, is that Buzzard. Reckon he has scented more Injun sneak-thieves."

"Verily, I hope not!" objected Vandegrift, with a genuine "ah-um" of Quaker origin. "The Lord will not see fit to visit molestation upon his Lambs to-night. Thy intimation thou shouldst have withheld, Miaco."

"Oh! dry up, Hoop!" the little Texan replied, in disgust. "Yer thees and thou's are not endurable this weather. Blast it, I hope old Jupiter Pluvius will cheese it, pretty soon, or we'll hev to build a second Noah's ark."

"Yes; between the rain and the unwelcome visits of Gray Wolf's Vagabonds, our stay at



"HOLD! STAND, YOU RUFFIANLY CREW, OR I'LL MAKE BUZZARD FOOD OF YOU!"

Flood Bar has been more unpleasant than profitable.

What is it, Sam?"

For Squirrel Sam had ceased his reading, and was listening, intently.

"The Old Buzzard returning," said Miaco, rising, "I hear hoof-strokes coming down the gorge. He's comin' like a dubbel-jointed comet, too, fer some reason."

"One accord the miners rose and stepped with-

in the tent. The night was inky black, and the stars fell with an ease that was wonderful—fell in straight, large drops that counted where they fell. No wind was now blowing, and the air was warmer.

The dismal roar and sighing of the pines upon the mountain side was now rivaled by the rushing and roaring of Squirrel Creek, swollen into a river of tremendous volume.

As the four men stood outside the tent and listened, swift, ringing strokes of steel-shod feet were heard coming down the north gorge, out of which the rising stream poured.

"Rec on 'tain't Old Buzzard, after all, tho'!" observed the dwarf, after a moment. "His hoss don't strike like that. 'Pears to me I kinder suspect who that feller is."

"You do?" exclaimed Belmont, turning. "Who, pray?"

"I ain't a-going to tell ye, fer I ain't sure about it," was the reply. "Wait, an' ye'll see."

The little lantern over the entrance to Miaco's marquee cast out but a faint illumination over the heads of the miners, yet it enabled the lynx-eyes of Squirrel Sam to make a discovery which he pointed out to Jim Belmont, and the others—simply a little water at their feet—yet it told them that the flood water of the roaring stream was creeping up and rapidly submerging the bar.

"We're in fur it, sure enough!" assented Belmont, glancing at the black sky. "The ground is thoroughly soaked, and this rain now but adds to the volume of the stream. After this horseman comes up we must get off the bar or be swept away; for the flood will increase till midnight."

Nearer and nearer came the hoof-strokes, and presently a horseman, with a lantern swung about his neck, was seen spurring madly down the valley, urging his steed with whip and spur.

"That's not Old Buzzard, no more'n I am," said Miaco, as soon as he caught a glimpse of the horse and rider; "nor 'tain't none o'—"

He did not finish the sentence, for all had to leap back to avoid being trampled down by the horse, as it rushed swiftly by, across the bar.

"That man is an outlaw, I'll wager my life!" cried Jim Belmont, "and his business down hyar is to find out what kind of a place we've got."

"Verily, I believe thou art in the right groove, James!" agreed Vandegrift, with a devout "ah-um!"

"The Philistines are all around us, and verily, our lives hangeth on a thread!"

"That feller was Flying Floyd!" said Miaco, after a moment of thought. "He is Deadwood Dick's lieutenant, and they call him the Sky-rocket. Don't know what he can want down this way, however, since et's whispered—but never mind just what, now. Our greatest enemy at present is the water. 'Ewon't do to leave the tents here; we'll hev to take 'em along with us back onto ther rocks."

"I'll go and see if the way of retreat from the bar is clear!" said Belmont. "The rest of you tackle the tents."

So saying, the Virginian hurried off. The only retreat from the bar, except by water, was to follow back and scale a rocky bluff; indeed, this was the only reliable outlet from the Squirrel Creek gorge which the miners had yet discovered. After passing over the bluff trail for a mile or more, a descent brought you into one of the many short but beautiful valleys for which the Black Hills country has already become famous. In this valley a half-dozen colonists had built their homes; of them, more anon.

Jim Belmont was gone but a few moments. When he returned, the others had the tents down and banded, and were ready to leave the bar.

"You can't git off that way!" the Virginian said, pointing over his shoulder toward the bluffs, with a grim expression revealed upon his face by the lantern-light. "All of Gray Wolf's red Vagabonds are lurking in the bluffs, waiting for us to come off the bar, so that they can riddle us with their pea-rifles."

"Then, what in thunder are we going to do?" demanded Miaco.

"Verily, we hath no choice but to surrender ourselves into the power of the Philistines!" put in the Virginian.

"Here comes Buzzard, now!" exclaimed Belmont, as a horseman dashed out of the gorge, and drew rein before them. "Hallo! where you been all summer, Buzzard?"

The little old man sprung out of the saddle, and shook himself in his wet garments, before replying. "Great ham—I mean, good heavens!" he ejaculated, with a shiver, "of this ain't none o' ther durned storms, then chaw ther essence out uv a red nigger, as was ther exclamation o' Jumpin' John Rogers, w'en his wife baptized him in ther coal-scuttles. Wet! Shouldn't wonder a bit. I've had the badness soaked clear outen my durned old karrack-tar, in this equinoctial rain o' Ploopter Jutius. But, business, boys; business before pleasure, as ther musketeer set ter ther fat victim who war tryin' ter sleep, w'en a hail nation war callin' fer him ter cum an' stop remonization. Ef ye vally yer auburn tresses, sakes, fer ten mile above hyar are a water stoppage, an' w'en it busts, things'll hum, down in this direction!"

"But we can't get off the bar over the bluffs," protested Belmont. "The Vagabonds are thar, an' we couldn't raise the ascent and live."

The old scout whistled his surprise, and, then, turning upon his heel, walked away toward the end of the bar, to see how much of it was submerged.

When he came back, his ready wit had formed a plan of extrication from their dilemma.

There were two giant linden trees growing close to where they were standing, whose densely leaved tops would not only furnish a safe refuge from the flood, but shelter them from the gaze of their Indian enemies, who held the bluff.

In a few words Buzzard explained his plan to the others, and it was accepted. First, the paraphernalia of the camp, including the tents, bunks, cooking utensils and mining implements, was hoisted up among the branches, and then the five parads of Flood Bar ascended, also.

The rain continued to pour down without cessation, and the addition of thunder and lightning made the night more wild and cheerless.

"I'm glad ter see ther fireworks, b'yees," said Old Buzzard, in answer to some remark. "Et speaks o' fair weather comin' afore long."

Louder roared the river below them; it was filling up the whole width of the gorge from wall to wall, and by a loud roar was heard in the distance, and Buzzard turned to his companions.

"Hang on now, my rosebuds, fer ther dam hes bust, up ther gorge, an' it's goin' ter give these trees about all the wetth' they can stand up under!"

They heard it—a roar almost deafening; the mad sea of waters was rushing toward them.

CHAPTER II.

DEATH BEFORE—DEATH BEHIND.

THE valley before mentioned, which lies east of Flood Bar, was one of wondrous beauty. It had a smooth prairie bottom of half a mile's width, from which charming slopes stretched away gently upward until met by the gray rock of the mountains.

Noble groves or mottes of timber dotted the vale, and several modern residences, built of quarried stone, stood down near these mottes, surrounded by lawns and outbuildings, and everything to make a home comfortable.

The home of the Waltonbys was perhaps the prettiest, and one, after days of rough, tiresome travel through the Black Hills country, would have been surprised to stumble unexpectedly into this remote but well populated valley, where half a dozen venturesome colonists had chosen themselves homes, and had worked their very hardest to beautify and improve their possessions.

Mr. Waltonby had once been a rich man, but speculation and private claims had impoverished him to such an extent, that but a few thousand dollars had been left him. With this he had joined his fortunes with a colony, and brought his family into the Hills.

He had built his comely residence, and had taken pains to make its interior, and the extensive grounds around it, as handsome as his limited means would permit.

A stranger approaching the place, one of these wild wet days of which we have been writing, was struck by the inviting appearance, and drawing rein at the edge of the grounds, surveyed the residence with some curiosity.

He was a man of an age somewhere between twenty-five and thirty years; with a heavily bearded face, dark, gleaming eyes, and hair that fell halfway down his back. His form was stalwart and muscular, and his dress that of a mountaineer.

"So this is the home of Cyril Waltonby, eh?" the stranger mused, interrogatively. "He has a pretty place, I must admit, and I'll wager my life that he dreams not of my coming here, in his peace and security. I wonder if my disguise will bear close scrutiny, for I should not want to be recognized until my plans are better matured."

So saying the stranger dismounted, and hitching his horse, strode toward the house.

As he stepped upon the veranda, a young woman came out of the open door, and the two stood face to face. The young lady was perhaps seventeen or eighteen years of age, and formed in nature's most perfect cast. In face she was not what a critic would call beautiful—rather ordinary in feature, with soft brown eyes, and hair like a reflection of sunlight. Her dress was plain but neat fitting, and there was grace in her movement, and something that was charming about her.

"Miss Ida Waltonby, I believe?" the stranger said, raising his slouch hat.

"I am Ida Waltonby, yes, sir," the girl replied, shrinking back, as if by intuition that the man was evilly disposed. "Who are you?"

"I go by the sobriquet of Red Lark, my dear young lady. And I have a message for you, by and by. But, first let me see your father, whom I have important business with."

"My father is in bed, sir, and it will be impossible for you to see him!" replied Ida, unhesitatingly. "He has an attack of his heart trouble and will not be disturbed."

Red Lark uttered something suspiciously like an oath under his breath, and paced to and fro across the veranda.

"I must see your father," he said, at last, stopping before Ida with a savage scowl. "Go tell him that the cat's leaped the gate, and the dog's chased her into the woods, where she is hiding. He will understand, I guess."

Entering the house, Ida hurried up-stairs to her father's chamber, and gave the white-faced, suffering man upon the bed, the message sent by the stranger, Red Lark.

The words seemed to have an electric effect upon Mr. Waltonby, for, with a gasp he sat up, his eyes glaring wildly around.

"Where is he?" he gasped. "Show him to me."

By the gods! I will kill the devil-possessed wretch!"

"The man is down at the door, papa: had I not best send him away?" demanded Ida, greatly terrified at the sudden rupture of affairs. "He is your enemy, I'm sure; please let me send him away."

"Yes, yes, he is my bitter enemy, daughter, and though the blow is destined to fall, sooner or later, I must postpone it—inust, for your sake and that of my wife, your mother. Go tell him I will not see him—that I defy his power to do the worst. Tell him never to show his face here again."

Willingly Ida obeyed her parent's dictation, and delivered his message to the bearded stranger.

Red Lark received it with a sardonic smile, and without a word strode down the yard, veiled into the saddle, and spurred on up the valley, through the drenching rain.

His coming—what did it signify to the Waltonbys?

"Hold! stand, you ruffianly crew, or I'll make buzzard food of you!"

The challenge was delivered in a resolute, ringing voice, by a young man, and the scene was rather a dramatic one.

Mountains all around, with forest-crowned peaks, and in the center a little table-land or plateau. A score of grim, fierce ruffians stood at bay, near the center of this, facing a pair of leveled revolvers, in the hands of one who commanded, as above—a youth. In years, though in bodily development a man. His stature was about the average of that of western men, and every limb and muscle was like iron. His face was smooth, with the exception of the upper lip, which supported a slight mustache.

He was every bit a handsome man, and yet one whom one might justly fear as an enemy.

Behind him, as he stood confronting the ruffian band, crouched a young girl, not yet seventeen, who was the possessor of a rare, dusky beauty, and a shape of marvellous perfection. Indian blood mixed with American evidently coursed through her veins, but the taint would have scarcely been detected by an observant eye.

"Back, you devils!" cried the young American, again, his aim wavering not a trifle—"come not a step nearer, or you shall die, one by one, as long as I have powder or power. This girl is mine, by right of rescue and protection, and I'll keep her, you bet yer little souls!"

A growl went up from the ruffians, and their leader, a large, burly man, of dark, swart face, gleaming, bloodshot eyes, and a monstrous sweeping black mustache. He was a human brute of repulsive aspect as one will often meet, and with such a crowd of backers, few men would have dared to face them as this young American was doing, with no little apparent trepidation.

"Give up the girl! She belongs to me an' I'll have her, or cut yer cursed head off!" shouted the leader, in a rage. "You thief, you'll find when you try ter pick a flower from our posy-bed that ye've got inter ther wrong hornet's nest."

"Oh! no, sir ruffian; I ain't at all afraid of you, or I'd run. I've seen lots of blustering bulldogs like you, and never got bit by one of them, yet. Come on, if you're hankering after any of my traffic. This girl's goin' back to Deadwood Dick's camp, where she'll get good care. And, by the way, my hearties, you'd best watch sharp, lest Deadwood Dick gets after you, for he is not far away, and his name is ringing steel and bullets to such as you."

And so saying, Flying Floyd, the young lieutenant of Deadwood Dick, seized the maiden in his arms, and, still covering the ruffians with one pistol, began retreating step by step backward, along a narrow ridge or hog-back, which ran out from the table-land, and on each side of which yawned a frightful chasm, whose bottom must have been fathomless, judging from the dark depths.

"The devils mean to try our worth, miss!" Floyd said, glancing into the scared face of the maiden. He had found her struggling in the grasp of Big John Wolf, upon tumbling accidentally down the mountain side into their camp, and had, in his dauntless way, gone at once to her rescue, with the result we have seen.

"They are as ferocious as wild beasts, but will have to work if they get us as their prey."

"Oh! sir, I fear that we can never escape them!" exclaimed the girl, in a voice of marvellous sweetness. "These men are a score to your one. How can you hope?"

"I always hope, miss. Never yet gave up the ship when there was a plank to cling to. Those ruffians will not shoot, either for fear they might also hit you, or they wish to take me alive—probably the latter, knowing as they do that I belong to Deadwood Dick's band!"

The girl gazed searchingly into Flying Floyd's eyes.

"You really belong to Deadwood Dick's band?" she interrogated with dilated eyes.

"Oh! I am now afraid of you."

"Indeed? But without cause, young lady, for no female ever found molestation or can justly speak ill of Deadwood Dick or his men. I belong among them, as lieutenant, since the Prince's return to the hills, and though it is rumored that Deadwood Dick is again upon the road, I can vouch that it is not to recklessly rob or plunder."

These words were spoken while hurrying rapidly along through the deepening twilight, which overhung the picturesque mountain landscape. The course of the remarkable ridge, or hog-back, now gradually curved and ran between two ranges of towering peaks, but the chasms still yawned upon either side. Ahead the view was obstructed, beyond a certain distance, by the curving. The grade of the ridge was slightly ascending, but the back was

smooth, and rapid progress could be made. In some places, however, the footing grew so narrow that it was almost impossible to save one's self from tottering over into the abyss.

Flying Floyd, however, passed these places, without difficulty, and safely. He was as sure-footed as a mountain goat. It was a narrow, dizzy path, which none but a man of nerve would have undertaken to traverse; yet, Flying Floyd hesitated not when he thought of the pretty burden in his strong arms, even while his gaze was fixed upon the dogging outlaws.

Step by step he advanced, not knowing whither the ridge trail would lead him, but bound to take the brunette captive out of peril if it lay in his power.

Big John Wolf was one of the worst wretches of ruffian type anywhere along the border, and, as leader of a ruffian crew, had won a wide-spread notoriety for his cruelty. He was said to never forget nor forgive an enemy, and Flying Floyd was aware that the mountain outlaws meant to follow him until they had a suitable opportunity to capture and punish him. To kill him outright was evidently not their desire or intention.

On, along the dizzy height hurried the intrepid lieutenant, with rapid strides, scarcely noticing the frightful abyss that yawned upon either side, to fall into which meant certain destruction.

With Big John's outlaws, however, it was different. They weakened in such places as this, and where Floyd walked boldly across, many of them crept upon their hands and knees.

This put them behind, out of gun-shot, and by quickening his stride Deadwood Dick's lieutenant kept them there for a time. But his burden was a solid weight, and before a mile had been passed over, began to tell upon his strength.

Still he kept bravely on, encouraged by the assurance, that if he was not gaining, the outlaws were not, either. They were dogging perseveringly behind, but made no extra efforts to catch up with him.

As he hurried along, and turned this important fact over in his mind, it dawned upon him like a flash that perhaps there was a cause for their not being in a hurry—that, perhaps a trap was lying in wait for him, at the end of the hog-back into which they calculated he must fall.

"It's something, I'll guarantee!" the young man thought, glancing over his shoulder, for he had now turned his back toward the outlaws. "Danger is the word. Young lady, you have not yet told me your name?"

"My name is Nolie, sir—Nolie Waltonby. I am, as you may have guessed, partly an Indian. For years I have been a prisoner in the band of Big John, and never until to-day, have I been beyond the camp, from which you kindly rescued me. There is a secret about my birth, but I won't speak of that, now."

"No; conversation now is difficult; but I thank you for your confidence in me. I am known as Flying Floyd."

After that, little or nothing was said. Deadwood Dick's lieutenant kept determinedly on, his eyes gazing steadily before him. On—on; then he stopped, abruptly, and began to retreat.

He had found the outlaws' trap! And a triumphant yell from them told that they were aware of the fact.

The hog-back had abruptly terminated!

Below and beyond its end, for the space of forty feet, yawned a gulf frightful to contemplate.

Beyond this space or break in the path was a continuation of the ridge.

Rapidly Flying Floyd retraced his steps for perhaps thirty yards; then with some inward exclamation, he clasped Nolie closely in his arms, and bounded forward at the very top of his speed.

*The daring lieutenant was about to attempt the leap-
ing of the frightful gulf!*

CHAPTER III.

WHAT THE FLOOD BROUGHT.

WHAT A frightful position was that occupied by the five pards of Flood Bar, with the knowledge that an awful wave of water was rushing fiercely toward them, from the dam, down through the wild, sinuous gorge! The roar of the storm was drowned by the greater one of the on-coming flood. The jar of heavy thunder and the vivid glares of Heaven's pyrotechnics, made the night and the situation all the more wild and awful.

In the tree-top the five miners crouched, hugging hard to branches, for they were fearful that the tree would be snapped in twain by the shock of the water, or mayhap be uprooted, and carried on down the gorge.

"Looker out; she's comin'!" sung out Old Buzzard, from the very topmost branch. "Hear her roar! Great ham-bo—I mean great Jerusalem! et reminds me uv the roar w'at emanated from a young buller bull I heer'd on, once, w'en he sat down on a Canada thistle. Hold ter yer constitootions, my posies—cling to yer cross like a red-hot grizzly, an' never let et be sed that water washed ther Injun hate out o' yer calendar! Moses thet in ther—I mean holy Moses! Hayr she comes a-yoopin'!"

And it was even so.

With deafening roar, outrivaling Heaven's own artillery, the water came bulging in a great roar into the wider ravine which the miners had christened Flood Bar—came leaping on like some angry monster wrought to the pitch of fury by the warring of the elements. The miners peering from their retreat saw all this revealed by the flash of the lightning—saw that the great flood was nearly as high as they, and then, with muttered prayers, waited.

Squirrel Sam was the coolest man of the lot, for

the reason that in all this awful roar and din he never spoke a word; and neither did he seem to quail beneath the horrors around them.

Old Buzzard, though a "leetle skeered," as he afterward expressed it, was brave, and his words of cheer encouraged the others.

On came the remorseless sea of boiling, foam-capped water; it struck the tree with a jarring violence, and bent it half-way over, while great clouds of spray shot toward the leaden-hued sky. One moment the whole tree would be buried beneath a giant wave; the next the water would sink half-way down its trunk.

Fortunately the ordeal was quickly past. In five moments the great flood had spent its force, and the waters only swished and gurgled at the foot of the tree. But to those in the branches it had been a fearful ordeal—the worst pull by the strong arm of death that they had ever experienced.

One of their number, old Hooper Vandegrift, had been washed away, and the remaining four were more dead than alive. It was accordingly some time after the falling of the waters, ere either of the survivors spoke.

Old Buzzard finally broke the silence.

"Waal, feller-citizens, how do we stand? are we still hayr, or aire we sum'a'rs else? Aire we aire we, or aire we not aire we? All on duty please answer ter roll-call. Ar' ye thar, Jim Belmont?"

"Present, all except a piece of my cheek, which a stick gouged out, and appropriated!" grimly responded Belmont.

"Squirrel Sam and Miaco?"

"Both here!" replied the dwarf.

"And Hooper Vandegrift, the man of 'thee's an' 'thou's'?"

"Is gone," said Miaco, gravely. "The end of a floating log struck him, and knocked him clean out of time. Poor cuss hedn't time ter say his kitenkiss-ems. 'Spect he never know'd what struck him."

"Then thar's only four on us, eh?"

"That's all. Waal, ther popolation o' Flood Bar war a leetle too large, ennyhow, an' one demise ain't ter be regretted, w'en thet same demise war no less a chap than an agent o' Big John, the outlaw!"

"What! do you mean to say the Quaker?"

"Was no Quaker at all, but an agent thet Big John sent down heer ter rob us o' our a riferous. But, I kept a watch onter his grab-hooks, ter see thet he didn't get anything."

"By Jove, this is surprising news. How did you find it out?"

"I do not propose to tell that. Let et suffice ter say that I found et out. I hev a way o' diskiverin' things w'ich sum folks don't know nothin' about."

Still hearing the water upon the bar below, the miners concluded not to venture down until daylight came.

So they remained in their relative positions throughout the whole wild drenching night, which had been so strangely eventful.

Morning at last dawned dully and gloomily, with a slight cessation to the rain from a pour to a nasty drizzle. As soon as it was light enough, the four tree-top refugees began to look around them, before descending to terra-firma, which the water still covered in patches, and would until the creek fell.

"The Injuns hev got stormed out, or else thar warn't none!" said Old Buzzard, scanning the bluffs to the east, by aid of his field telescope. "Aire ye sure that thar war Injuns, Belmont?"

"So sure, thet I was induced to prick one's throat w' ther end of my bowle-knife," was the grim response of the Virginian. "Guess the feller never knew what struck him."

"Waal, I guess the varmints konkluded we war washed off, an' so 'll wait till a more auspishus time ter visit ther Bar. Ther dirty Vagabonds aire ther dastested, ornerliest set o' pilgaricks thet side o' Jordan. Great interlectual ham-bo—I mean great granddaddies! ef I war as mean as a Vagabond dog I'd hide my hed betwixt my legs an' hire out fer a museum curiosity."

"Ha! by all thet's wonderful, I've made the biggest discovery of any o' ye!" here shouted Miaco, excitedly. "Look! look! a cabin! a cabin!"

He pointed toward that end of the bar which nosed out into the river, or rather the western end, for not only had the flood added greatly to the size of the bar, but had made it an island by cutting in close to the bluffs and wearing a channel through, thus dividing the river into two courses, which joined together at the southern termination of the bar.

The miners gazed quickly in the direction indicated, and to their astonishment beheld, perched safely down upon the extreme western end of the bar, a log cabin, all in perfect shape, and intact, as it had been fetched by the flood. For it must have sailed down upon the rush of water, else how came it here?

The door was shut, and the two windows which were visible to the miners from the tree-top, were securely blinded by strong oaken shutters.

Whether this habitation was tenanted or not was a question, and one which was of vital importance to the four miners of Flood Bar. And they proposed to investigate the matter, and accordingly descended to the ground.

"By all ther legal technicalities uv ther Blackstone judisdiction, this aire one o' the funniest o' funny things!" said Old Buzzard, as they all stood upon the ground and gazed toward the mysterious visitor.

"Who ever heerd o' a cabin sailin' down thru ther mountains an' landin' at one's feet, when ye war jest in need o' one? Great ham-bone thet chalked old Jon—I mean great granddaddies! Ef thes ain't an age o' wonders an' blunders, may my old carkuss be utilized fer fertilizing purposes!"

"It is remarkably strange, indeed, and a miracle how the habitation ever rode the torrent without being totally wrecked," averred Jim Belmont.

"But, come! let's go fer the old caboose, and see what's about her."

The dwarf Texan, Miaco, being in the lead, went ahead, and Belmont, Old Buzzard, and Squirrel Sam followed at his heels.

A covering of sticky mud had been landed upon the Bar, which with puddles of water, here and there, made the walking exceedingly disagreeable.

"I hope the flood has not washed away all our gold," said Belmont, with a look around at the desolate aspect. "Things seem rather dubious, just at present."

"And we can prepare to roost in the mud, for a week!" growled Miaco. "Ha! great God, I'm shot!" They had approached to within a score of yards of the mysterious cabin, when the dwarf reeled and fell, simultaneously with the crack of a rifle.

"Great ham—I mean holy lava o' Mount Pisgy!" ejaculated Old Buzzard, catching the wounded Miaco by the hair of the head, and starting back in the direction of their former camp. "Back action, ye durned galoots, ef ye don't wanter teetotally wreck your constitution against a snag. Thar's horns in thet condemned nest, w' sharp stingers, jes's sure's thar's music in ther argumentive send uv a horse-wi'-long-ears!"

An instant retreat was made, for the one shot was evidence enough that the mysterious cabin had an occupant, who was averse to receiving visitors at so early an hour in the day, if at all.

Who this occupant was, or of what breed or nationality, they had no means of learning. Someone, certainly, who bore them no friendly feeling, or else the shot that wounded Miaco never would have been fired.

Miaco was not severely hurt—only a slight perforation through the side, from which the blood flowed copiously, but not a serious or dangerous wound.

They soon had the flow of blood stopped, and the dwarf was able to walk around. Camp was again pitched, and the four pards began to feel themselves more at home, only for the presence of the mysteriously-inclined individual in the cabin, which Old Buzzard had christened Noah's Ark.

"I don't see that we can do anything more than to keep an eye on that shebang, and let her alone," said Belmont, that night, as they all sat in the door of Miaco's tent, and gazed off toward the forbidding structure. "We ain't strong enough to make a rush and bu't in the door, an' ain't got a cannon to bombard et with, so what is there left to do?"

"Nothin' but keep watch," replied Miaco, "though I would mighty like ter know who's inside. Reckon they'll hev ter come out, 'fore long tho', fer grub, unless they've got an extra stock of pervisions aboard."

"Great ham—I mean Jerusalem Jenkins! don't fret about thet!" said Buzzard. "I onc't knew a feller, up in Montana, who war cornered in ther end uv a canyon fer sixty-nine years an' three hundred an' sixty-four days and twenty-three hours, peractly, an' he actooaly subsisted on water all thet peer-yod, 'ca'se he war afear'd ter cum out fer fear ther Injuns would get him. Also onc'e knew a man who lived ter be two hundred an' four years aged, an' after he got ter be thet old, he never eet anything fer ther next century."

As there was no telling in what way things might shape, during their future stay at Flood Bar, the four pards concluded to nightly post a guard, for, not knowing anything about what force might be concentrated within the black cabin, they thought it a necessary precaution to be ready for an attack at a moment's notice.

"If thaire's enny virtue in bone-aches, an' premonishuns, an' spasms down yer back-bone, I'm bettin' high thar'll sum day or other be high times hayr in Flood Bar, jest on account o' thet Noah's Ark. Durn my old sow's last litter o' pigs, but ther great equatorial snow-storm o'—I mean, this great Buzzard wull dissect them w'at's in ther pesky ranch."

Flood Bar one month later. Not as we have seen it before, but now a lively mining excitement, with white tents pitched upon the Bar, upon the barren rocky shores of Squirrel creek, and even upon the bluffs and mountain side.

But the only cabin visible was that Black Cabin of the Bar, whose mystery remained unsolved. Since the influx of miners to the Bar, several attempts had been made to break into the old pile of logs, but without avail. The blinds and door and walls were perforated with rifleloopholes, and every attack had been met by fire from the inside, with more or less loss of blood to the miners.

A couple of hundred of these eager, excited humans were there, of the male sex, who were tolling for gold in Squirrel gulch; every foot of the Bar had been leased by the Four Pards, at an enormous figure, they only retaining enough of the soil to keep them busy. Every foot of the Bar was undergoing a search, with pick, pan, and shovel; miners were working close around the Black Cabin, but no one after the several repulses, made bold to pry into the secrets of the mystery-enshrouded habitation. Miners were prospecting in the bed of the two creek channels, and up the mountain sides, and even into the dark ravine through which Squirrel Creek poured down from the north.

Belmont had started a weigher's business in his tent; Buzzard derived profit by bringing game into market; Miaco, who really was the best scholar and business man of the 'pards', kept office, and bought and sold 'claims', for the firm of Belmont, Squirrel Sam, Buzzard and Co., Miaco being the 'Co.'

And things grew livelier, daily; rumors of big strikes at Flood Bar brought in men from ever part of the Hills, and women too; two enterprising individuals had built a hotel; a stage line was started from Deadwood; saloons had their inauguration

Boys in under canvas tents; gamblers came to ply their vocation, and last but not least, report wafted into Flood Bar upon one morning's breeze, a name, well known in every part of the country of gold—a name the mention of which was a harbinger of excitement and peril—

DEADWOOD DICK!

CHAPTER IV.

DEADWOOD DICK'S BULLETIN.

WHEN the name of the great road-agent of the Black Hills became whispered about in Flood Bar, there was an unprecedented excitement. For a considerable period the Black Hill-ites had suffered no molestation from Dick's men. This was while Dick was up in Idaho, and down at Del Norte, as related in Half-Dime Library No. 49.

But it seemed that the dashing Prince of the Road was back again, and people hugged close to their pocket-books, and regarded their neighbor more sharply, lest suddenly he should dissolve into a road-agent.

A crowd of miners were sitting in Old Buzzard's tent, one night, when a comrade digger of gold rushed in with a flushed face, and panting breath. He was greatly excited, and related his "say" in gasps, though we give it plainly for the reader's benefit.

"I war coming in from the Musquekang valley, whar I've been on bizness!" spoke this miner, Jerod Judson, by name, "when I hed an adventur'. I war comin' thru ther dasted lonely woods, just beyond ther bluffs, an' et war gettin' duskish, like, when I heerd a clatter o' hoofs, an' lookin' ahind me, I see'd a dozen horsemen comin' after me, at full tilt.

"Natterly, I war ruther nervus, an' knowin' thet 'twas no use ter run, I dodged into a clump of manzintas, an' squatted 'bout as low as I know'd how. On cum ther horsemen, rippity scoot, and a wholopin' ther hats inter ther air, an' yellin as ef Bedlam war let loose. I war beginnin' ter breathe a notch easier, when I thort they war goin' ter pass, but they didn't—nary a bit! They jest yanked their hosses out ter ther side o' ther road, an' nailin' up a big bulletin-board, w'ich four on 'em hed carried between 'em, ter a tree, they pasted an advertisement onter it, then mounted an' galloped away, whence they hed cum. Gentlemen, one o' them cusses war him—the reckless road-agent devil—Deadwood Dick!"

"Great intellectual ham—I mean, jaws o' ther algater thet swollered old Neptune!" ejaculated Old Buzzard; "ye don't say so—ye don't aver on yer religyus honner, thet ye see'd ther great original Dicky—ther pet galoot o' ther 19th century?"

"I jest do, bet yer slippers on that!" declared Judson. "An' I purpose thet a party on us go back an' see w'at thet notice on the bulletin-board says."

"I second ther perpetual moshun system!" assented Buz.

Accordingly a dozen men were picked out, including the three pards, Belmont, Buzzard and Miaco, and set out to inspect Deadwood Dick's bulletin-board.

Squirrel Sam being absent from camp, of course could not be included.

The weather had now settled into mild, gentle spring, and the nights were growing warm and beautiful. A flood of moonlight lit the path for the party, causing them to look strangely white and weird, as they tramped over the rugged bluffs. The scent of wild fragrant flowers, and newly-budding trees, was borne deliciously upon the evening breeze.

"Don't know as I ever saw this Deadwood Dick!" Belmont remarked, as they trudged along, for as the distance was but a matter of a couple of miles, they had taken no horses.

"You'll never want to see him the second time, if he once gits a grudge against you," Miaco suggested, "though he ain't half so desprit a cuss as fo'kes make him. Leetle by leetle a small lie fatters strength and credence, until it finally becomes a monstrosity and an undisputed fact among the people."

In due time the party arrived in the woods which Judson had mentioned as being the place where he had seen the road-agents. It was a gloomy pine forest, through which a tolerable stage trail had been worked through to the Musquekang valley, beyond. And just such a place it was as might suit the kins of a full-fledged road-agent, for a place of operation.

"It war in hayr, up a ways furdur!" explained Judson, casting his eyes around him in rather a doubtful manner. "Hope ter gracious ther pesky galoots won't be layin' fer us. 'Spect they went back inter ther Musquekang."

"Deadwood Dick wouldn't tech sich a sorry-lookin' passel o' pilgrims as we, anyhow," declared Old Buzzard, "unless he war purty sure thet we hed more chips than we know'd what to do with. Oh! he's game an' a straight caliber chap is Dickey, ef I do say et. Great ham—I mean Josephat! I've known thet boy ter do things w'at knocked ther seven wonders uv ther world inter a cocked six-shooter. Once see'd him stop a mad bull w'at war chasin' a horse-fly across a prery, jest w'at ther power o' his eyes, fer he's a mesmerist, is Dickey! But, hayr's ther bill-board, now!"

"Yas, this is the place," assented Judson, as they all paused before a bulletin-board, which had been nailed up to a pine tree by the roadside.

Upon the board was pasted a bill, which had been executed by a printing-press, and which Judson had seen Deadwood Dick's road-agents post there.

And the following is what the miners from Flood Bar read, with not only surprise but wonderment:

"BLACK HILLS, May 3d.

"To all whom it may concern:

"I have come back to the Black Hills, after an absence of several months. I have not come back to rob and plunder honest and hard working, deserving men, but as Deadwood Dick, the Road-Agent, and the advocates thereof. The Black Hills needs a thorough purging and cleansing of the murderous wretches and ruffians who swarm within its haunts, and I'm the one to do the job, with the assistance of my men, and all I ask is the good will of the honest part of the population, and their occasional co-operation. That of the Government I am sure of.

"The friendship or good will of my future foes, I neither crave nor expect. As they have dealt with others, so shall they be dealt with. By the decree of the law we are yet outlaws, and road-agents.

"Before the end of our campaign, we hope to be free men, once more. That is what we're working for. So, look out for us, ye evil doers, and stand not in our path, ye Doubters, for we shall recognize all friends as foes who stand up before us in opposition.

"SIGNED: DEADWOOD DICK AND HIS EAGLES.

"N. B. My men are all among you, many in number, bound to me and each other by solemn oath and therefore invincible, though invisible.

"A case of wrong against honest men by any one of my men, reported to me, will receive prompt attention, and punishment to the offender. We war only against evil-doers. DEADWOOD DICK."

This was what the miners of Flood Bar read, and if they were amazed it is little wonder. Deadwood Dick was again on the trail as both Road-Agent and Regulator, and that things were going to be lively again within the scope of the Black Hills, they well knew.

Whether the good the dashing Road Prince would do would offset the bad, and the enemies he would create, was a question for time to answer, not for the men of Flood Bar to decide.

In a large majority of cases they had known, or had had experience with Deadwood Dick, and while many of the miners sided with the reckless Road-Agent, more cursed him, and swore dire vengeance upon his head, should he ever give them an opportunity to pay him an ill turn; so that it looked bad for Deadwood Dick in his proposed campaign against the ruffian element—as if he would have as many honest men to fight as of the evil-disposed.

All over the Black Hills were these bulletins posted, at the entrance to every town or mining strike, and often the daring dozen rode straight into a town to do their work, distributing their heralds broadcast in the very faces of their enemies.

One of the principal resorts of Flood Bar, was a large circus-shaped tent kept by two enterprising men from Denver, who had drifted here with the human tide. The place was floored and well-lighted, inside, and bore the name of the Inter-Ocean Saloon, although besides the saloon, it was a concert hall or pavilion and a gambling den, where all sorts of games were run, night and day.

As there was no similar place in Flood Bar, of course the Inter-Ocean received the general share of the patronage, and, with good order, a part of the time, and Deadwood City prices, the proprietors were reaping a rich harvest.

The concert every evening was a great attraction, the proprietors, Messrs. Hallowton and Miles, often bringing down "stars" from Denver to cater to the tastes of the dirty, rough miners.

On such occasions many of the females of the Bar came in to listen to the music, quickly departing after the concert was over, for it was a poor place for respectable women.

One evening, a short time after the posted declaration of Deadwood Dick, we will look in upon the Inter-Ocean for a few moments.

Inside all was a bustle and excitement. A large crowd is gathered, and while waiting for the "star" of the evening to appear, the gamblers offer their greatest inducements to attract the wary an' dunwary to their fold for the purpose of fleecing them.

A large gang of roughs were, under the effects of fiery beverage, growing noisy and boisterous, and Messrs Hallowton and Miles tried several times to quiet them down. Their efforts, were, however, unavailing.

There was half a hundred of the gang, and under the leadership of one of the roughest customers in all the Black Hills—Big Hank Hagen was this man's name, and he had, on coming to Flood Bar, at once asserted his rights as "champion" "boss" and "bully," and as no one had ever had either the courage or muscle to dispute his assertion, it became a settled fact in the mind of the people, that Big Hank with his rough, devil-disposed backers, could lick the town, if he chose, which gave the burly bully double assurance in his power and prowess, and made him naturally more bold. And as, with him, boldness was but the precursor of brutality, he became a pompous, bragging nuisance to the town.

The card upon the concert boards to-night was Miss Lucille Desmond, who purported to be a New York opera-singer, but, if she did hail from further away than Denver that dirty crowd was mistaken in its guess. The impression was that she was a Deadwood "high-kicker" or a stage-struck Hoosier gal, whom Messrs Hallowton and Miles hoped to reap a harvest from.

Wherefore the surprise of the audience, when the singer stepped before the curtain. At a glance she was anything but a can-can dancer or a Hoosier girl, this fair, intellectual girl, with her creamy complexion, her dazzling bright blue eyes, and long auburn hair, and a form that rivaled the shape of Venus in symmetrical grace; and a wild hoarse cheer went up

from the motley assemblage beneath the great pavilion, which nearly frightened her out of her composure. But, she soon regained her confidence, and stepping forward with a gentle courtesy, burst out into such a grand strain of exquisite song, that the attention of every person beneath the canvas was enchained as by a spell.

Nothing like it ever had been heard in the Black Hills.

Her voice was as pure as the tone of a silver-bell, and as sweet as the voice of a bird. Flute-like in their intensity, her wild, peculiar notes reached far beyond the tent, even, into the black, stormy night, without. And her audience listened, spell-bound, for they had, for the most part, never heard anything like it.

She sung once, and was about to retire, but a perfect pandemonium of yells called her back, when a shower of wild mountain flower-bouquets fell at her feet—pouches of gold and silver were hurled in upon the stage without number, and the night rung loud with cheers and encores. For these rude and oftentimes ruffianly western miners, have a great heart within them. I never yet met a miser in the far West.

Loudest in the encores was the bullying rough, Big Hank Hagen. The man's eyes had been fastened greedily upon the songstress all through her singing, as if he longed to devour her like some ravenous wild beast.

"Hurra! hoop! hoop—hurra!" he bellowed, swinging his hat above his head as he stood mounted upon a deal-table.

"More song, me lady—more song, or we'll bu'st ther ranch!"

Pale and scared, for she was not used to such demonstrative audiences, Lucille again responded, and again and again, until feeling faint and giddy she turned to leave the stage. But with the agility of a panther, Big Hank leaped from his perch the deal-table across onto the stage, beside the terrified girl, with a yell that would have done credit to a Comanche warrior.

"Hold up, my sweet gal—don't be so fast ter go ontill ye've sold me a kiss from yer purty lips!" the bully cried, throwing his brawny arms about her waist, with a triumphant leer.

"Help! help!" screamed Lucille, in horror, while she struggled frantically to free herself.

But no one appeared to have the assurance, if they had the disposition, to help her, for Big Hank and his men were present in force to-night, and interference meant a free fight. So no one stirred to help the poor girl—all stood and gazed upon the scene without offering assistance.

"Help! help!" she again cried, as Hagen's whiskey-scented breath flamed her cheek. "Are there any men among you, who will help me?"

"Ay! ay!" cried a stern, ringing voice, "Deadwood Dick is with you!"

CHAPTER V.

THE DEVIL'S HOLE.—DEADWOOD DICK BEGINS HIS CAMPAIGN.

WE left Flying Flood about leaping the yawning abyss—a distance of many feet to the continuation of the hog-back beyond. But what man could ever hope to leap over that frightful space, with such a burden in his arms as the dusky girl whom the brave lieutenant carried.

Floyd knew that positive death lurked behind him, and that there was promise of it in front. Yet he hesitated not, for he had often been face to face with the grim monster, and had grown, as it were, somewhat reckless of the consequences.

On—on he bounded, at the top of his speed. The gulf lay just ahead, a great gap in nature's furrowed face; across it he must leap in safety or—die! Death must surely follow a fall into that black abyss. Nearer and nearer he bounded toward the brink, and when upon its very edge he gathered his strength and made the fearful leap, while a yell of combined indignation, incredulity and horror went up from the pursuing outlaws. They had not for a moment imagined that the daring road-agent would ever contemplate such a thing as trying to leap the abyss; they had proposed to corner and capture him.

Up into the air and gracefully forward like a rocket shot the lieutenant, with his prize clasped in his arms; with dilated eyes and bated breath the outlaws watched him, in wonder at the power in his limbs which impelled him so swiftly through mid-air. But, alas! only too soon he began to sink, far short of the goal he had aimed to reach, and down! down! he sunk into the black misty depths, out of the sight or hearing of man. With cries of consternation Big John Wolf rushed forward to the brink of the precipice, and gazed over, down into the blackness. But nothing could they see. A dense fog prevented their seeing twenty feet below the brink.

"Reckon et's good-by Flyin' Floyd, and ther gal too!" growled Big John, angrily. "We war darned fools we didn't shoot the cuss, an' git back ther gal. As et ar, thar'll be red devils to pay w'en Red Lark comes back an' finds ther gal gone. He'll rip an' swar like a suck-tornader, an' ef some o' you fellers don't get broken skulls, I'm mistaken!"

Then the outlaws turned and fled back along the hog-back, to the plateau from whence their pursuit of Flying Floyd had called them.

Where were the lieutenant and his dusky charge? In the few seconds he was flying through the air toward the opposite side, he had ample time to perceive that he had miscalculated his powers—that he was going to fall far short of the brink, and be plunged into the awful abyss, whose depth might be fathomless. It was a horrifying thought borne to both Floyd and his charge at the same time; but

then they began to sink so rapidly that their breath was taken away.

Down! down! down, through an atmosphere damp and thick—down, second after second without cessation, but seemingly faster and faster—into the very bowels of the earth, as it were, and yet still on and downward.

When they struck, Nolie was unconscious, and a dead weight in Flying Floyd's arms, who, by a wonderful exertion of will, had kept his senses. Instead of being dashed to jelly upon a hard, rocky bottom, as the road-agent had expected, they were plunged into a deep, round lakelet or well of water, which fully broke the force of their fall, and thereby saved their lives.

As soon as they rose to the surface after their watery bath, Floyd struck out blindly through the dense darkness, in search of footing. Nolie was still a dead weight upon him, and he was nearly exhausted when he finally succeeded in finding a low, sandy shore, and getting out of the dark, bubbling water.

It was a great relief, and he could but thank God that the result of his leap for life had been no worse. What the future had in store for them in this dark pit he had no idea; but it was his intention to find out as soon as possible. If the chances of escaping were as ill-favored as the place was ill-smelling, his hope of life was indeed slender. And the sluggishness of the waters suggested the thought to him that this strange mountain lake had no outlet.

Laying Nolie upon the sand, he proceeded to wring the water from her garments, and then from his own; after which he took a tin case from his pocket and produced some matches which the water had not spoiled.

By feeling around along the shore he soon was successful in gathering an armful of fagots, which he ignited, and fanned into a bright blaze, that lit up the surrounding scene with wonderful distinctness, and he was able to discover something about their situation.

The lake was considerably larger than he had anticipated, probably covering something like twenty acres of bottom. The abyss, according to this must be the narrowest at its commencement above, growing a great deal wider as it descended. As well as Floyd could determine, the lake had an outlet somewhere under the shelving cliffs upon the opposite shore, and a great bubbling in the center of the lake showed the existence of a large spring beneath the surface.

A narrow shore ran nearly all around the water basin, but otherwise this singular body of water was walled in by giant mountain sides that no human power could scale.

After making these observations, Floyd gathered more pine fagots, of which there was a plenty that had tumbled down into the abyss, and replenished the fire, after which he set to work at restoring Nolie to consciousness.

By the application of water, and liquor from his canteen, he soon had her in full possession of her senses and speech, and they stood at the fire to dry their garments, while a strange expression was wrought upon their two faces, both of which were handsome in their different types.

"We're in the Devil's Hole!" exclaimed Nolie, with a frightened look in her eyes. "How did we ever get here, alive?"

"By falling into the lake, we saved ourselves," Floyd replied. "Do you or Big John and his men know aught of the place?"

"No more than that it is said to be bottomless," "Which was but a conjecture, as you see that we have found a bottom. But the next thing is to find a way out of the place."

"Yes. But, may be there is no way out. What then?"

"Well, then we shall probably be compelled to make our home here for the rest of our natural lives."

"But, what would we live on? We should starve for want of food."

"Not if we could manage to subsist upon fish, which abound in great plenty in this remarkable mountain lake. We have enough wood here to last for years, so that I think we could manage to get along somehow. But, before preparing for a life-long stay, we must discover if there is no way to escape. To play Robinson Crusoe in the bowels of the earth is not any part of my calculation if we can get out."

"Deadwood Dick is with you!" and the audience gazed breathlessly on as they beheld the road-agent spring upon the stage, a revolver in either grasp—the same daring, resistless Deadwood Dick, whose fame and deeds had been heralded throughout the land—handsome, dare-devil Prince of the Road, who never hesitated to face death in defense of a woman.

Straight upon the stage he sprang with the eyes of nearly all Flood Bar turned upon him, as he caught Big Hank Hagen by the throat.

"Help! help!" the bully bellowed, releasing his grasp upon Lucille, and turning upon the road-agent; "whar air ye, pards? Roll up—pitch in, an' we'll grind thes 'ere cuss inter ashes."

But though their leader thus appealed, not one of the ruffian's crowd moved; they stood as if riveted in their tracks, with too little assurance and faith in their own prowess to attack the man who perhaps of all men was the most feared by these denizens of the Black Hills. Not a move they made, nor did the "honest" element of Flood Bar, for they were secretly rejoiced that Big Hank had at last found his master, for the two men were now fighting desperately with knives—fighting for life and death.

A breathless silence crept within the great pavilion; not a breath scarcely or a sound save that of

the two duelists and the clashing of their knives; every one stood watching with intense interest, for a great deal depended upon the issue.

Should Big Hank go under, Flood Bar's greatest nuisance would be disposed of; at the same time if Deadwood Dick were to fall, the Hills would be rid of a scourge greater than death itself. These were the two opinions, and more were there who sided with the bully than with the road-agent.

The contest was waged with unabated fierceness. Big Hank had received several ugly cuts, which made him furiously mad. Dick was bleeding freely from his adversary's attempt at carving, yet he was apparently not the least angered. That same reckless coolness and composure were his, in battle or out; he feared neither man nor devil: he fought with ease and composure; even there was a faint smile resting upon his countenance and emanating from his dark magnetic eyes.

Among the spectators who had just arrived, were Old Buzzard and Squirrel Sam, watching the contest with great enthusiasm, for both were enemies of the bullying Hagen, who had in different ways taken pains to cross them.

The old scout and hunter, however, was the most affected by the sight, for a grin continuously lit up his grotesque countenance, and occasionally he would give vent to his feelings by a yell of delight in such moments, for instance, as when Dick would "lantallise" a vein of his adversary.

Squirrel Sam, no matter what were his feelings, never spoke, but occasionally a smile of exultation would linger about his mustached mouth.

"Great arithmetical ham-bo—I mean great Jehosephat!" roared Buzzard, dancing delightedly about, as the road-agent parried the brute blows and put in some extra fine thrusts. "Old Moses who in their rushes did vegetate! at him, Dickey, ye dasted skunk! Put in yer work, ye little disease o' destruction! Make ther pilgrim bite ther end off'm his own constittocchin. Actooally see'd a feller up in Montana, onc't, gents, w'at ked swallerd himself, turn inside out, an' then outside in erg'in."

Clash! clash! went the knives of the duelists. The blood from their wounds stood in little pools upon the stage, or ran its way across and disappeared in a chance crack. Blood soaked their garments and spotted their faces, and still they battled on, each determined to kill the other. Of the two, Big Hank was the weaker, for it was perceptible to all that his strength, courage, and resolution were giving out; but Deadwood Dick did not seem to be weakened by his terrible loss of blood; he was, as it were, made of steel—no give out in him. How long would both hold out? How long could it last?

"Hoop! yip! hooray!" shouted Old Buzzard, prancing around within the limits of a table-top, on which he was perched; "game is thet same Dickey, gentlemen—game c'lar ther end o' his fingers an' toes; yes sir-ee! He's a great cavortin' lamb from ther old buckin' flock, I tell ye—a ginnyswine skewrupshus galoot, w'at kin teetotally diskount any hyena ye ever see'd. Three cheers fer Dick Harris, gentlemen, off ye don't object!"

And these miners of Flood Bar evidently did not object, for immediately after the old man's proposal, the pavilion rung with a great triple chorus of cheers.

"Thet's ther style o' ticket ter vote, gentlemen!" continued the irrepressible scout—"ther very same ticket, you bet yer brass jewelry. Great deceptive ham-bo—I mean Jehosephat, yes! My name is Buzzard, feller-citizens, an' Mr. Chairman—Benjamin Baltimore Brewster Buzzard from Bumble-bee county, Gopher State, an' redly am I ter swar by ther star-galnted spanner on Deadwood Dick."

In the meantime Deadwood Dick was bringing matters to a close.

The burly bully, Big Hank, was fast growing weaker, and it was only the matter of a few moments, ere he must succumb.

Dick could, as it were, have slain him easily enough, but this was not his intention. He wanted to merely cow the wretch, and make him docile.

A few more blows, then Big Hank staggered back, threw up his hands and sunk upon the floor. He was done for. His wounds, none of which were probably serious, had overcome his ferocity, and he was aware of his defeat.

"Enough!" he gasped, and then fainted outright, amid uproarious cheers for Deadwood Dick from the crowd.

Which the young road-agent received without visible manifestation, as he restored his knife to its sheath, and turning, assisted the now almost unconscious Miss Desmond to her feet, and conducted her behind the scenes. The crowd yelled for him, but he came not; they continued to yell, which had the effect of bringing out Mr. Miles, one of the proprietors of the Inter-Ocean, who respectfully announced that Deadwood Dick had already taken his departure.

CHAPTER VI.

ELIJAH SWAIN, HISTORIAN, ETC.

Yes, Deadwood Dick was gone, and these people of Flood Bar had to content themselves with the knowledge. But when the men got together, on the following day, and discussed and rediscussed matters, it was made a universal decision that if the young road-agent bravo ever showed his face in Flood Bar again, he should not be suffered to escape. And with this object in view, a party of the "good and honest" men of the Bar formed themselves into a band of vigilantes, swearing death to Deadwood Dick and his men.

On the following day a crowd of loafers were lounging about the tent of Old Buzzard, listening to the old eccentric's yarns concerning his exploits in

the past, and smoking up more poor tobacco than would stock an ordinary tobacco loft.

While they were thus lounging, and watching the blue-shirted miners of the Bar at their work in the broiling spring sun, they were interrupted by a comical-looking individual who had approached, and was endeavoring to attract their attention, by gesticulations with a blue cotton umbrella.

He was of medium stature, with a face hid behind a mass of bricky-red hair and beard, his nose and gleaming eyes being all that was visible of flesh about his countenance. He was clothed in corduroy breeches and vest, and a long faded swallow-tail coat, while his feet were incased in heavy brogans, and a battered plug hat ornamented his red unkempt locks. His make-up was generally conducive to laughter, while the redness of the end of his organ of scent was more than assurance of good health; it suggested "bummer."

"Waal, waal! Jehosephat an' ther ham-bone o' old Joner! What d'ye want?" demanded Buzzard, a grim suggestion of fun lurking amidst the stain of 'terbaccy' juice in the corners of his mouth. "W'at for d'ye stand thar a-wiggling o' thet umbreller at us, an' never sayin' anything. Be ye a g'ost, a hog-goblin, or an automater? Or be ye tongue-tied, or got dumb? For ther Lord's sake do say sumthin' ter break ther mermotous state o' ther sittyness. Sing, orate, grunt, or ask us ter come an' see ef it looks damp an' liable ter rain water ter drink."

"An' ef et don't rain water, they keep an excellent substitute in ther shape o' prime old mountain-dew, a couple o' doors above here."

"Yas, I don't mind ef I do treat, boys," was the drawing response in a tone that was purely Yankee. "But, first, let me interdooce ter yeou a few items o' my business heer, fer ye must see I'm a business inclined man. My name, sirs, ar' Eljer Swain, o' Swainville, Swain county, Maine. I have graduated in five colleges of the State, an' hev branched out into life as a historian and biographer. I have written several histories of the United States, an' of all ther prominent men o' ther days, none of which hev yet been put upon the market because I ordered them ter be withheld. I will contract to write up any o' yer biographies, gentlemen, at five cents a line, an' not write less than ten thousand lines; an' if your life has been uneventful, I'll add a few terrible adventures and hairbreadth escapes for a slight advance on the price of the biogrophy, an' ef ye want ter be killed off at ther end, I shall be glad to accommodate ye, hev appropriate funeral ceremonies, and a thirty-eight foot marble shaft erected at yer he'd. Anything in my line ter-day, gentlemen?"

"Guess not," replied Buzzard, with a wink at the crowd. "Reckon my history wouldn't sell very well. Great deplorable ham-bone, no! I'm too well known, I tell ye! Whar kin ye perambulate, from ther north pole ter ther south—from ther east pole ter ther west, whar ye will not run across ther name an' fame of Old Avalanche, ther great Injun Annihilator—ther great boreal disease o' annihilation and extinkshun—ther terrific an' original eppydemic o' these lattytudes an' longtoads! for Avalanche am I, feller cittyzens, an' no mistake—ther notorious, no-eared pestilence of ther Nor'-west. Nol no! guess ye kan't rite my hist'ry ter-day, fer et's faithfully inscribed on ther mem'ry o' every feller w'at's seen an' read o' me, 'twixt heer an' ther line o' ther equator."

"Wal, et ar' too bad, I swar!" commented Elijah, dolefully, "but one disappointment hedn't order discourage one strong-minded man like me, nohow. Ken't I make yer biographical records, gentlemen, ter-day?"

But these men of Flood Bar shook their heads. They had no desire to become famous, and have their lives carried by history before the eyes of future generations.

"Well, there's no use o' goin' around w' one business w'at won't pay, an' tharfore I combined another with mine. Ther government, gents, in virtue o' sum obligations w'ich we hed together, appointed me U. S. Coroner. I received the appointment as an honor fer ther good my biographies done the rising generation. Tharfore, gentlemen, do ye know uv any new cases o' suaisancide or murder, or any defunct bodies I can sit on, and thereby derive my commission from the government?"

"Guess ye're bound ter be disappointed in thet line, too, Eljer," replied the Annihilator, facetiously. "Hain't seen nary a corpus layin' around loose fer a month o' Sundays. 'Spect ef ye keep in ther rear end of Deadwood Dick, tho', that ye'd be liable ter find suthin' ter set on, ef it weren't no more'n a dead coyote."

"Oh! I don't include the animal kind," said Elijah, stiffly. "I deal only with defunct corpses o' collateral humans." And then he turned and walked out upon the bar, where a hundred or more men were busily engaged with pan and shovel.

A laugh of derision followed him, for so green and awkward appeared he, that the risibilities of a saint might have been aroused at sight of him.

"I tell you what!" said Jim Belmont, to Old Buzzard—now, by his own confession, the veritable Old Avalanche—as the eccentric individual tramped away, "thet feller is either crazy, an' idiot, or is some sharper in disguise. I am inclined to the latter theory, for that is all boss about his being a biographer and so forth. I'll bet he can't read his A, B, C's!"

"Oh! great marrow o' ther bone w'at old Joner swallered, thet's nothin', Jimsy—absolutely no more'n a pizirine in an ocean o' merlasses. Once know'd a feller w'at got rich takin' ther fotygraphs o' Soo Injines—fact, by gracious. An' soon old Sticks-in-the-Mud I'arn't the art, an' lastly, they tuk ther artist's picter as he war performin' jimnastics up

in ther atmosfere, wi' a tight cord around his neck."

"Well, if there ain't sumthin about that feller, concealed from us, I'll eat a fat Greaser," replied Belmont, and the Virginian meant it, too, for he had a keen eye for observation and reading character, that rarely ever led him wrong.

But, as if innocent of all these suspicions against him, Elijah Swain continued faithfully on around Flood Bar, making his proposals, and, strange to say, really taking a few contracts.

For some were there among the miners who believed they were going to be eternally made famous by this modern solicitor and historian, whose persuasive argument led them to believe and invest.

That night was a hot one for early spring, with a clear and hazy sky, and very little air stirring. After the cessation of all labor, the miners might have been seen strewn about the Bar and along the tented creek shore, engaged in cleaning their weapons, smoking their pipes, or washing out a clean shirt, for, as yet, the almond-eyed Chinaman had not made his advent at the Bar, and consequently every miner who had no family was his own laundryman.

Avalanche, Belmont, Miaco and Squirrel Sam were lounging in front of the latter's tent, watching with indifferent curiosity the tide of humanity about them, when Belmont spoke up, excitedly:

"Listen! listen! What woman on the Bar has such a voice? Even Miss Lucille Desmond cannot equal it!"

"It is perhaps she," suggested Miaco, as all hands listened eagerly, "for she aire the best singer I know of, at the Bar, now."

"No, it's not her," replied Belmont. "Hear? it comes from the direction of the Black Cabin!"

His words were true. Floating toward them from the direction of the mysterious Black Cabin, came the melodious strains, varied and wild in tone, the voice being as pure and unwavering as a lark's note or the trill of a flute.

The words of the song could not be heard, but the song itself was exquisite. Weirly beautiful rung the peculiar throbbing vibrations of the well-cultured voice, and then, when nearly the whole of Flood Bar, as it were, was spell-bound by the enchanting melody, it died out in a strange, wild, mournful shriek, blood-curdling and demonic.

The Four Pards exchanged glances.

"That's something wrong," declared Belmont, scratching his head, thoughtfully, "an' I'm wonderin' what. 'Pears to me like as ef they've got a crazy person penned up in the cabin."

"Or sum wild beast," suggested Miaco.

"Great ham-bone w'at performed old Joner's last president's message, no!" replied Old Avalanche, in disgust. "Ye don't suppose a wild anymal kin sing, do ye?"

"What is your opinion then, old man?" demanded Belmont. "I have been watching you, and see that you have formed one."

"Ef w'at aire thes great destructive eppydemic's opinion, d'ye ask? Waal, I hev jest rented ef out, an' kin't tell ye. Thes heer old cavortin' disease aire goin' ter know ther secrets o' thet cabin, or slip an eccentric, sure pop. Old religious an' antediluvian ham-bone w'at w'ar ther last sickness uv old Joner! Ef thar's humans in thet Noah's Ark, this notoriouse snow-flake aire goin' ter find ef out, an' make 'em pull down ther blinds."

No more of the singing shrieks were heard in the cabin, however, that night, and Flood Bar's people's minds again were quieted into repose.

But something occurred on the following night, which threw the little town into a turmoil of excitement, for on awakening in the morning, it was found that the Bar and its inhabitants had been robbed! Yes, robbed of all the gold or currency upon their persons—not only one but all—every man in the mines! In the dead of night the robbery had been silently performed, while slumber held the people in its deep trance.

Cleaned out of thousands of dollars' worth of precious gold and greenbacks was the little town on Squirrel Creek, and as there were no pretensions of religion there, of course the profanity among a certain class was great.

Deadwood Dick, agreed these miners, was the robber—Deadwood Dick who had declared himself the friend of the honest man, and the enemy of outlaws and ruffianism. Who else could the daring act be attributed to?

"Don't b'lieve nothin' o' ther kind!" was the sole response of old Avalanche, when he was questioned concerning his views of the case; "twarn't Dickey at all, no more'n twar President Hayes, or sum other high-toned off-holder. No sir-ee, I'll bet ther sharpest tooth in my old jaws thet ef warn't Dick. Great unsophisticated ham-bone w'at equilibrated old Joner! thet same cavortin' pestiferous Dick wouldn't no more steal yer honest ear'nin's, than he'd bu'at his individual b'iler!"

But these Flood Bar-ites were not all of the veteran Annihilator's opinion, and fierce and vindictive was the spirit against Deadwood Dick.

Large rewards were offered for the dashing outlaw, and the Vigilantes were on the alert.

The great Lucille was booked for another concert, that night, and it was expected the dare-devil road-agent would be present. Therefore, the Vigilantes were on hand, in disguise, ready to nab the dashing prince upon his appearance. But they were destined to be disappointed. Neither Deadwood Dick nor any one resembling him was seen in the great mass of humanity, and Lucille sung on to-night without molestation, for Big Hank Hagen, though present, was too badly used up to show his prowess again, when he found that the songstress had at least one friend in the singing camp. But with all the ruffianly desperation and desperate nature, the Flood Bar

bully now equally loved and hated the fair singer—loved her as well as he was capable of loving any one or anything, and hating her because of her terror of him.

And knowing that she feared him, he yearned for greater triumph over her—yearned to possess her and crush her proud spirit as the Texan horse-tamer frightened the young wild horse into submission to his will.

Hagen sat in an obscure corner of the saloon, during the concert, and watched with evil in his blood-shot eyes, a peculiar vindictive smile lurking about his coarse mouth.

When she appeared for the last time, he arose and glided from the tent, a crafty expression upon his sinister countenance. He still had the use of his left arm, and springing upon a horse that was standing at the door of the saloon, he shook the reins, and galloped along the creek shore to the ford to the Bar, just below the rising eastward bluffs.

Here he dismounted, and concealed his animal behind a thicket of firs, while he himself crouched in hiding, and waited.

Below him and across the waters of the creek gleamed the lights from a score of miners' tents that were located upon the Bar, while further on, upon the opposite shore, were more of these canvas habitations, saloons and stores, similar to those which had been erected upon the eastern shore, along which ran the trail leading into the upper canyon, where several paying quartz lodes had been discovered.

Big Hank had not long to wait; he expected the great Lucille to soon come along, and pass over the long foot-bridge to the Bar, where she procured boarding and lodging with a miner's wife, and soon he heard rapid footsteps approaching.

But they were clearly not those of a lady—too heavy, quick and elastic for such. A man was coming to cross the ford—who?

CHAPTER VII.

THE ENTRANCED ANNIHILATOR.

"Curse the girl, why don't she come?" the bully muttered, impatiently, "and who is this cuss coming along to skeer my bird away? Blast him, I'm a notion to salivate him through ther pate an' chuck him in the creek."

But on the new-comer's closer approach, Hagen concluded not to adopt his proposal, for the man was the silent member of the Pards of Flood-Bar—Squirrel Sam. Handsome and manly looked the young miner, as he strode along with head erect, and eyes glancing around, and Hagen secretly envied him his good looks. But, Squirrel Sam was not molested, as he stepped upon the long shaky suspension foot-bridge, and passed over on the Bar.

"The next will be the gal!" Hagen muttered, as he continued to crouch in his concealment, and listen to the sounds upon the still night. "Ef I kin only git my clutches upon her, one't, never fear but she's mine, safe enuff. These Black Hills hes got plenty o' safe nooks ter hide a gal in, an' I'll be ther owner uv as purty a piece o'—"

He stopped and listened. Footsteps were again approaching, and this time they were light and rapid, which indicated to the scheming villain that the fair songstress of the Inter-Ocean establishment was at hand.

And crouching like a panther in his lair Hagen waited—waited until the footfalls sounded just in front of him—then he leaped to his feet and out from his cover, with a yell of great triumph. But that yell turned to a growling curse, as he beheld, instead of the expected Lucille, no less a person than Deadwood Dick standing facing him.

Yes, Deadwood Dick, who had punished the bully of the Bar, a few nights before, and for whom the miners of Flood Bar now offered large sums.

If Hagen was astonished, Dick was probably not less so; yet he was instantly upon his guard, with a revolver in his hand, ready for use.

"Hello! what do you mean? Have you turned highway robber?" the Prince asked, his tone tinged with sarcasm. "I expected to find your carcass lying in some hole, hereabouts, depending upon the generosity of some philanthropic soul to bury it."

"Oh! did ye?" sneered Hagen, recovering his composure, somewhat, although he could not but feel uneasy when Deadwood Dick had the drop on him. "Waal, I ain't dead yet, ef ye did accidentally carve me sum. Didn't take me for a weak calf, I hope? Ef ye did, thar's whar ye make a mistake, fer, Mr. Deadwood Dick, or watever-ye-name-is, you aire my prisoner."

"Your prisoner? By what authority?" Dick demanded, coolly.

"None o' yer danged bizness—'cept thet I want ye ter surrender, or I'll bu'st yer jug fer ye, in style, an' give ye ter the Vigilantes."

"Oh! don't—please don't!" mocked the road-agent. "I know ye wouldn't harm a poor innocent little thing like me!"

Big Hank did not reply except with a curse, as he leaped forward to seize his enemy; but there was a howl of rage, and a sharp flash and a report, under which Hagen went to the ground.

"There, you brute, I guess maybe ye'll keep quiet, now, for a spell!" Dick muttered, spurning the body with his foot.

Then he turned away, and crossed the foot-bridge onto the bar, moving with exceeding caution, for to be caught napping by the now indignant Flood Bar-ites, meant battle, and a hundred chances to one, of death.

He had not been gone ten moments when the songstress came along in company with Messrs. Miles, of the Inter-Ocean establishment. They saw the dead bully lying by the roadside, and Miles gave a breath of relief.

"One good riddance, thank God!" he ejaculated, devoutly. "Some one's made a funeral for one of the worst ruffians in the territory. Flood Bar, I'm sure, will feel relieved."

Old Avalanche, Belmont, Miaco and Sam were sitting in the dwarf's tent, later that same evening, smoking and spinning yarns, as was their wont, when there were no fights or excitement outside, to attract their attention.

"Ketch Deadwood Dick!" the Great Annihilator was saying, in contempt at some previous remark; "no, sir-ee! nary a ketch of a feller who signs the eend o' his luv letters wi' thet same notorious name."

"Well, if Deadwood Dick much longer evades the law and justice, it'll be far beyond my expectations," said Belmont. "Why, every other man in the Bar, nearly, has now joined the Vigilantes, and sworn death to the dare-devil road-agent."

"I don't care a durn ef every uther galoot, an' every other galoot's next door neighbor hes jined the Vigilantes; thet hain't significant thet they're a-goin' ter sift their fingers through Dickey's beautiful hair. Great Centennial ham-bone thet perplexed old Joner! ef aire my solemn wish thet ef they don't let ther boy alone, w'en hes offered 'em fa'r inducements, thet he'll pitch inter 'em, an' lick 'em like thunderation. Grasshoppers an' religyus buzzards! Ef Dick do ever git his back up, ag'in, I tell ye things'll smoke, an' ye kin bet yer constitoobin on t. Why, sar, ef ye war let heer uv sum o' ther wonderful exploits Dickey's did, yer hair'd fly up on end so quick thet ef'd jerk yer scalp off—fact, by gracious! Once know'd uv a similar circumstance, up in Montana. After ye heer ef ye kin't doubt my word in sayin' thet 'twar wonderful. Ther case war sumthin like this: A feller hed lost his first wife an' married a second. But he still loved ther fust, an' used ter go set on ther top o' her stun every day, an' whittle up pieces o' rails as offerings sacrificial ter her sperit. One day while sittin' thar, he felt a cold clammy hand lain onter his cheek, an' his hair stuck upon end so quick thet ther electricity uv ther moment completely ripped off his scalp, jerked his neck out o' jint, an' dislocated his back-bone. They buried ther poor galoot next day, an' his ashes aire now soaked inter lye, deep down in Terrance Firma, or ye kin call me a liar!"

"Avalanche," broke in Miaco, "I do solemnly believe, meaning no 'fense, o' course, thet ye aire ther wust liar in existence. I once knew a feller who told a lie a minnit ev'ry day fer sixty years, an' then continued ter work double time ther next forty; but, darn me ef I don't b'lieve ye kin beat thet."

"Hain't goin' ter try, Liliput. Great forsaken ham-bone, no! I ain't one side o' a bufler bull ter ye, w'ich aire useless. Hal—"

The old man here started, and stopped abruptly in his speech—became rigid and motionless, his face as gray as granite rock. Not a muscle moved in his body, and his breath came very slowly.

In silent wonder his three companions looked on.

In no manner could they account for the strange change that had so suddenly come over the old man. But a voice, seeming to come from among them, soon spoke, and the words produced full as much mystery as the Annihilator's antics.

"Lay down, Avalanche!" the voice commanded, sternly, and to the astonishment and amused mystification of the three spectators, the veteran scout got carefully upon his hands and knees, and rolled over on his back, with a disapproving snort.

"None of your growling, Alva!" cautioned the voice of the unseen speaker, from another portion of the tent. "I won't have it. Shut your fly-trap, and your eyes, and tell me what you taste?"

"Tarantler juice, by ther great ham-bone!" was the quick response.

"And, what do you smell, Alva?"

"Fricasseed mud-turtle and clam salad!" was the reply.

"Ah! two very rare dishes, old man, which is conclusive that you have seen better days. Now, then, raise yourself to a sitting posture, and cast your eyes about you, and tell me what you see," said the same cool, stern voice, which now seemed to come down the smoke-hole of the tent.

Accordingly the Great Annihilator rose to a sitting posture, and gazed on every side, with apparent sharp scrutiny, although the three miners noticed that his eyes had a vacant, glazed look.

"Well! well! what do you see?" again demanded the mysterious voice, coming directly from in under Belmont's chair, and causing the Virginian to spring to his feet in consternation and surprise.

"I see th-the Black Cabin!" was the response of Avalanche, slowly.

Belmont, Miaco and Squirrel Sam now pricked up their ears, for the dialogue was growing more interesting to them.

"Can you see inside of the cabin, old man?"

"Great ham-bone, yes."

"Ah! that is good. There is a mystery you must solve since you have the key, Avalanche. Whom do you see inside the Black Cabin?"

"A man—an ornery-lookin' galoot, too."

"Indeed! describe him."

"Antediluvian ham-bone, yes. Guess I reckon thet figger-head, now. Seen him down ter sou' Big cuss, w' dark bazzoo, black eyes and black mustache. Dressed in ther toggerery o' a herder from Texas!"

"Armed, I suppose?"

"Moses in ther bullrushes, yes. More'n fifty-lev-en hoels in ther side o' ther wall, heart high, w' ther snoots o' rifles an' revolvers stickin' inter 'em. Asides, thar's a hull arsenal o' tools in his belt."

"Is this all you see?"

"All, pard, 'ceptin' ther furnitur'."

"Be careful, Alva, don't lie to me lest I knock you

down with my finger. Look sharp, and see if you can't discover another room."

Avalanche was now seen to bend forward, and glare keenly around, a scowl upon his furrowed forehead.

"Yes!" he replied, presently, "there's a door w'at opens inter ernuther room."

"Ah! that's more like it. Unlock that door and look inside. Take a careful survey. There, now; what do you see?"

"Great repinin' ham-bone w'at got snagged ag'in' ther larnyx uv old Joner! et's a Injun critter!" exclaimed Avalanche, with a sniff of disgust, which, for some strange reason, caused a broad smile to illumine the face of Squirrel Sam—"a reg'lar old cavortin', buckin' she-male squaw, an', holey darnin' needle uv old Cleopatra, she's got the maddest kind o' 'jims'!"

"Is she old and ugly?"

"Moses who did through ther rushes rush, yes—uglier an' ornier lookin' then my Florence Nightingale, or even old Samantha Snodgrass who lives up at Yankton. Mitey, but she's humbly, gentlemen, aire thet Samantha, an' she's been known ter frighten away ther birds an' bufflers fer ten year on a stretch, jest w' her old unbecom' mug."

"Stop, old man; you're getting clear off track. Has this Indian woman a mad look?"

"You bet yer a'riferous she hes! Looks madder than a wassup w'at's hed his stinger tuk."

"Is she a prisoner?"

"Shedn't wonder."

"Well, now look around you, and perhaps you may see something more that is interesting. Do you know who is questioning you?"

"Do I? Ham-bone w'at war cremated by old Joner, yes. I see ye even ef I ain't lukin at ye. I know yer voice like I do tarantler juice. You aire Deadwood Dick!"

Belmont and Miaco uttered an exclamation at this disclosure, and Squirrel Sam simply squinted one eye, and nodded for the others to be still.

"You hit the nail plum on the head then, Alva!" replied the voice of the invisible inquirer, this time coming from the earth at the Annihilator's feet. "I am Deadwood Dick, whom the Flood Bar Vigilantes long to clasp in their fond embrace. But they haven't got me yet, Alva, and when they do I'll let you know. But, look! it strikes me that there is another apartment to the Black Cabin, which you have not explored, is there not?"

"Darn my old mule's capacity fer oats, but ye're right. Yonder is another door, but it aire heavily barred, an' I'm gittin' ter old an' weak ter bu'st doors."

"Pshaw! You lack confidence. Look at me, and I will reassure you."

The eyes of the old man roved along the canvas siding of the tent, and finally stopped, and the three watching miners saw a pair of magnetic black eyes and part of a face peering in through a slit in the canvas.

But the face disappeared, a moment later, and the voice continued:

"You feel stronger, now?"

"Great ham bone, yes. I ken lick enny man w'at sez ther Annihilation ain't the greatest achievement in ther hull world, an' part o' Canady."

"Well, d'ye see the room, now?"

"Yes. That's a gal in et—purty as ary lialac ye ever seed!"

"Ha! that is the kind of news we are in want of!" returned the voice, now tinged with excitement.

"This girl—has she red hair?"

"Great hifalutin' ham-bone, yes—redder than ary rum-cullered nose ked be. Ther gal is crying, now, w' her head buried awtix her hands."

"Ah! and have you ever seen her before, Alva, and know you her name?"

"Ay! down in Del Norte I last saw her, for she is Leone Harris, ther wife o' Deadwood Dick!"

There was a smothered imprecation from without the tent—then Avalanche suddenly started in his mesmeric trance, his hands clutched.

"Fire! fire! the Black Cabin is afire!" he cried, breaking the spell and springing to his feet.

"Fire!" cried Deadwood Dick, through the aperture in the canvas; then he was heard dashing away.

"Fire!" yelled the crowd of miners, rushing by. And all was excitement in a moment.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BURNING CABIN.—ELIJAH SWAIN AGAIN.—THE SENSATION.—DEADWOOD DICK'S HEAD.—ADMISSION 30C.

Yes; burning was the mysterious Black Cabin, or at least so said these excited denizens as they rushed pell-mell across the bar.

Belmont, Avalanche, and Squirrel Sam leaped out of their tent, and glared around them.

The sky was reddened by a mighty illumination from the cabin, which was all ablaze. The timbers of which it had been built were old, punky, and inflammable, and a thousand sparks ascended heavenward at every puff of the evening breeze, while the flames roared and crackled furiously.

"Et aire good-by ter ther old crib as sure's there's contrariness in a she-mule's hind hoof!" ejaculated Old Avalanche, who had come out of his trance, and while thoroughly himself again, had forgotten nearly all concerning the mesmeric power Dick had thrown over him. "Great Norweejan ham-bone thet did old Joner strangle—of thar's any one in ther Ark, they're bound ter go to Canaan a-whoopin'!"

"If the cabin has the occupants you named in your tantrums, I'm reckoning Deadwood Dick will lose a wife—Leone, ye called her," said Miaco, as he too, came from the tent.

"What! what d'ye say, Stub, about Leone?" exclaimed the Annihilator, excitedly. "Whar is she? who's seen her?"

"None has seen her, old man," replied Belmont; "but, according to the revelation you made in your trance, a few moments ago, she is a prisoner in yonder burning cabin. Who is this Leone?—Deadwood Dick's wife?"

"Great forsaken ham-bone, yes—she war his wife, an' ther sweetest lump o' sugar outside o' a merlasses cask. But she got stole away while we war down at Del Norte, an' hitherto we've bin unable ter find a trace o' her. Yas, I remember now—I seed Deadwood Dick peekin' in at me, an' ketchin' my eye, he quick throwed me into a mesmeric trance, w'ich war easy fer him, he hev'n done it afore."

The four men joined in with the crowd which was pouring over on the bar from the shores, and pushed toward the burning cabin. They soon gained a place as close as the terrible heat would permit, and then stood watching the conflagration.

There was no aid which could be given, had the Flood Bar-ites been inclined to give aid, which they were not.

"D'ye kno' ef any one's got out uv ther old crib, yet?" Avalanche asked of a bystander, for the old man was shuddering each moment, when he remembered that possibly Leone, Deadwood Dick's wife, was being consumed in the roaring furnace.

"Yas—two gals and an old Injun woman escaped, ther gals goin' first, and ther squaw a-chasin' 'em, w' screeches like an ugly painter."

"Which way did they go?"

"Down ther canyon gulch, an' hid, so thet they ken't be found."

"Do you know how the cabin came afire?" put in Belmont.

"Waal, I dunno, but the story's about thet a galoot had two girls shut up in thar, w' a crazy squaw ter guard 'em, an' thet, gittin' tight on Flood Bar whisky, he concluded ter cremate 'em in ther latest approved style, wharfore he sot the cabin on fire."

"Then he escaped, too, eh?"

"O' course;—don't suppose he'd go inter the shebang afore thet, ter cremate himself, do you?"

"Didn't know but he might," the Annihilator replied, placidly. "Knew a feller once who got a stove hot fer ter set his mother-in-law upon, an' forgot hisself an' sot down kerslap onter it. Wal, a romance war thus begun. Settin' on ther stove naterly fried ther fat outen him, an' ther oily substance run all over ther floor, so thet his wife hed ter mop it up. An' she throwed ther moppin's in a hole at ther back door, an' an oil locator kim along, see'd ther grease w'ich hed riz on top o' ther water, declared crude petroleum ter exist thar, an' offered thet fried chap a thousan' an' a royalty fer ther claim. Did, by gracious!"

"At it again, old man," here interposed Miaco. "In heaven's name, whenever will ye cease ter lie?"

"Like yerself, Stubby—only when ther old angel Gabriel screws down my throttle, an' shets off my superflews steam. Hooray! Great degenerated ham-bone w'at give old Joner connipshun fits! See ther old Ark w'at Noaher built blaze up, an' shute her sparks upward like glinnywine Norweejan snow-flakes toward ther hevings!"

"Yes, et's a-go'in' fast—Great God!" cried Belmont, leaping back, as there was a great puff within the burning cabin, which shot a myriad upward—then a report not unlike the roar of a hundred cannons,—an explosion of giant powder, which tore the cabin into bits, hurling, in some instances, great logs to the opposite side of the Bar.

Nearly all the crowd were blown prostrate, and in some instances killed, or more or less injured. Avalanche was among those to suffer apparent death. He was found outstretched, with no signs of life about him, his old face mantled by a grim smile.

"He's a goner!" said Belmont, gazing regretfully down at the veteran Indian-hater. "Guess 'twon't be his odd expressions our ears will hear, arter this, pard."

"No, the poor old feller. Bet he never expected ter git layed out so soon!" replied Miaco. "An' a right sensible old galoot war he, too."

"Hello! w'at hev yeou heer? Glory be unto—ther chap who made me a subject ter sit on!" and following the words came the person of Elijah Swain, U. S. Coroner, and so forth. "Bizness is revivin', gents—times aire gettin' better; ther mortuary aire becomin' more reconciled an' puttin' et's work on in better shape. Just sot onter two men, back heer, an' rendered a verdict, w'ich war ten dollars in my pocket; one feller got kicked w' a flying log—ther other tried ter stop a cavortin' windy shutter. Step aside, gentlemen, an' let me set onter this unfortunate man."

"Ham-bone w'at explored ther mammoth cave uv old Joner! no ye don't!" yelled Avalanche, sitting upright so suddenly, that the business-inclined Elijah's hair nearly stood up on end. "Guess I ain't reddy ter be sot onter yet, ef ther old legislator knows herself, an' she rather opine she do. Git out o' this, ye lunatic, or by all ther bulls w'at Moses hid w'en he cavorted around thur ther rushes, I'll pulverize yer fer land plaster. *GL!*"

And seeing that the little old man was in earnest, Elijah quickly obeyed, and was later seen searching around in hopes of finding more defunct persons.

The cabin burned to the ground, and nothing but a glowing bed of ashes was left to mark its former site. Gradually the crowd dispersed and went back to their respective roosts for the night.

Avalanche had not been injured—only momentarily stunned. The old knight of the trail and war-path seemed to bear a charmed existence—at least he was always lucky enough to escape death, no matter how great the danger or severe his injuries.

Long life on the border had made him reckless, and

it is this class who ever seem to bear a charmed, invulnerable life.

That night a rumor was spread about that Deadwood Dick had been killed. A brawny bummer heralded the news broadcast, and it was pretty generally believed. But when a week had passed by, and nothing of the noted Prince of the Road had been heard, it was regarded as a fact. And the Flood Bar-ites breathed free. During the week, Avalanche had searched far and wide, in the vicinity of Flood Bar, both for Deadwood Dick and for poor abducted Leone, who had escaped from the Black Cabin, and sought safety in flight. But it had been a fruitless search, and he finally settled down to hunting and mining again, with the conviction that Deadwood Dick had indeed passed in his checks. As to Leone, he could form no conjecture of her whereabouts.

During the week another "grand" hotel, built of slabs and boards went up on the eastern shore of Squirrel Creek, which was now considered the first street of the town. It was called the White House, and because of being comfortably furnished, and setting forth a better array of grub, received the greater share of the regular and transient patronage. In short, it was a "first-class" boarding house, such as you find in all mining towns.

In one of the rooms upon the second floor, and looking down onto the picturesquely tented Bar, sat a man at the close of a mild spring day, when the miners were trudging in from their work, and night's early twilight was stealing softly over the landscape. The sun had so far gone down in the west that only a faint radiance flushed the mountain top, which rose stately and grand on the opposite side of the Bar, and rolled away in gorgeous pine-fringed piles as far as eye could reach.

Perfume of exquisitely sweet-scented May flowers wafted down and greeted the nostrils of the man we have mentioned, as he sat by an open casement, and with his feet elevated upon a chair-back, lulled silently at a heavy pipe, dispelling the fragrance of the flower's perfume by the scent of bad-smelling tobacco.

He was one whose age might have been anywhere between twenty-five and thirty-five, dark of complexion and swarthy, with a black ugly-expression, eye, a sensual mouth shaded by a heavy jetty mustache, and hair like the raven's wing. His dress was rough and coarse, with no pretensions to dandyism, and upon his head, he wore a herder's slouch hat.

"Curses upon me!" he growled, as his eyes roved over the scene, below, and at last rested upon the former site of the Black Cabin. "Why was I such a cursed fool as to get drunk and fire the old shell, when it contained my two prizes, whom I valued more than life? But they are gone, now, and the devil only knows where they are. I hope old Markessa did get 'em, and chaw 'em up, though by some crazy freak she might have befriended them. My only plan is to watch and wait. Chance might ergain place 'em in my power. And, they say Deadwood Dick is dead, too, which is a great relief to me, for if he were alive I should not care to walk boldly in the streets of Flood Bar. His wife, Leone, he loved too much, to ever give over her chase."

"Ah, life has been eventful since I left Del Norte; and, Hawk Harrington, you can call yourself lucky that you are not dead ere this!"

"Ay! that you can, if you have Deadwood Dick upon the enemy list!" replied a cool, calculating voice, so close at hand, that Harrington whirled around with an oath, and beheld a stranger, lounging against a table, to his left, with all the composure of a statue.

A man of trim build, with a dusky face that was purely Spanish, adorned by a well-waxed mustache, an evil-shaped mouth, piercing eyes, and the man himself dressed rather neatly.

He was well armed, however—"heeled," in the language of the Black Hills.

"What do you want?" Harrington demanded, rising, with an angry color in his cheeks. "You will please remember I've paid for this room!"

"Oh! have you?" was the Spaniard's reply. "I didn't know but you'd 'stood 'em off,' again, as usual."

"Who are you? what brings you here?" again repeated Harrington, angrily.

"Who?" said the other, reflectively—"well, I don't know as it makes any difference to you, as my name isn't concerned in any business, particularly. However, you can know me as Carlos Cambre."

"Cambre, eh? Guess I never heard the name. What do you want?"

"I can soon explain. I want information of either Deadwood Dick, or his wife, Leone, and was sent to you as being the person who might be able to assist me."

"Who sent you?"

"That unreliable sower of ill to men, Dame Rumor," replied Cambre, with a peculiar laugh.

"Then the Dame misled you," was Harrington's comment. "I know, now, absolutely nothing concerning those parties, though it is reported that the former is dead. The girl has been a prisoner in a power, but escaped, about a week ago."

"No, or you don't know where she can be found?"

"No, or I should hasten to repossess myself of her. What do you want of her?"

"Enough of her heart's blood that she may never breathe again—and the same applies to her husband."

"You are a villain!" Harrington said.

"Correct, and you are a duplicate. If you got the girl again, hunt me up, and I'll make you an offer for her!" the scheming Spaniard said, as with a patronizing smile he bowed himself from the room.

"Oh! yes, I am liable to do just what you propose, in a horn!" the Del Norte herder muttered, as he

turned his attention down upon the Bar. "The girl was a very tigress, and I never dared to attempt the accomplishment of my aims, for fear she'd dig my eyes out. But, by heaven, I am not through with her yet. I'll humble and degrade her, or I'll break her accursed neck, before I go back to the So-ri-west."

Flood Bar the next day was struck with a sensation. Before day-dawn a canvas pavilion had been stuck up on the old site of the Black Cabin, and pasted upon giant banners were huge, life-size portraits of Deadwood Dick, and a red and white poster containing the following:

"STARTLING CURIOSITY!

"WONDER OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY!

"THE GENUINE HEAD OF DEADWOOD DICK,
Preserved in liquor. On exhibition, now, within this Pavilion!

"The head of the greatest Road-Agent that ever lived! Recently captured and killed near Flood Bar.

"COME ONE! COME ALL!

"ADMISSION ONLY THIRTY CENTS!"

And when they awoke in the morning, these people of Flood Bar, they saw the great, glaring posters, heard the noisy harangue of the crier outside of the entrance, and, very naturally, all grew excited. For the head of Deadwood Dick was not to be seen every day, either dead or alive!

CHAPTER IX.

OUT OF THE PIT.—AVALANCHE'S IDENTIFICATION.

WE must now return to Flying Floyd, Deadwood Dick's lieutenant, and his dusky charge, Nolie, whom we left beside the strange lake in the bowels of the mountains.

After Nolie's restoration to consciousness, they sat or stood around the fire which Floyd had built, until their clothing had become thoroughly dry; then, they retired for rest by lying down close by the embers, and when they awoke it was still dark, with only a faint reflection from the sky coming down into the abyss, but even this made it a trifle better than on the day before.

"We now have all the daylight we can have down here!" Floyd said, looking to his watch. "It is already long past sunrise, up in the outer world. So if there is no escape from this living tomb, we shall not be troubled with too much light!"

"Oh! is it not a gloomy prospect?" sighed Nolie, burying her head in her hands. "I believe I'd rather have remained with the outlaws!"

"Fshaw! It won't do to get discouraged yet. There may be a dozen ways out of this dilemma, which we have not yet discovered. Wait, and I will corral some of the fish that seem to abound in this lake, and we will see if they are palatable."

He accordingly proceeded to lift shallows or bays to find them literally infested with a species of the finny tribe not unlike the salmon. A couple were soon in hand and dressed, and while there were few bones, there was a great abundance of fine delicious meat, which when Floyd had succeeded in roasting, he served up on bits of flat rock, which had to answer the purpose of plates.

The meal, though consisting of but one dish, was hearty, and amply appeased the appetites of our two inter-earth Robinson Crusoes.

After the meal had been dispatched, Flying Floyd lit a resinous pine cone for a torch, and accompanied by Nolie, set out around the lake in search of some mode of escape.

"There must be some place of escape for this water, more of which is constantly being added to the lake," said Floyd, as they marched along. "The volume of yonder spring is considerable, and this pit would soon fill up, were there not some outlet for the water."

"True, there should be some opening," replied Nolie, "but it may be too small to admit of our escaping through it."

They moved along, scanning narrowly the walls of rock upon their left, as the shore curved along.

"If there is any break, I think it is across the lake yonder, where the low ledges overhang the shore!" Nolie said, pointing over the dark water. "Let's go around there and see."

They did go around, carefully scanning the route as they went.

The ledges in question bulged out from the main wall, shelf-like, and so low down that a person was obliged to stoop down, in order to get under them and along the narrow, sandy shore.

"Here, if anywhere, you will find the outlet we are seeking!" Nolie said, pointing ahead of them. "You can go under the ledges, and explore, while I remain here."

Accordingly, leaving her behind, the lieutenant crept in under the great stretch of natural shelving, and along, by the aid of his little torch, making a careful survey as he went. For some distance he found no signs of any outlet, and was growing discouraged and impatient, when he came to where the water had worn its way out of the Devil's Hole. It was a large round tunnel in the solid rock, declining a trifle downward from the surface of the lake, and through which the superfluous water of the basin found exit. As he stood at the mouth of this aperture, Floyd perceived that a person could enter it standing half erect, but whether such a passage could be continued any great length of time or not, was to remain an unsolved question, until the two mountain-locked prisoners should choose to make the trial.

Floyd went back to Nolie, and related the success

of his explorations, and the probability of their being able to make an escape from the pit of darkness.

It was gladsome news to the poor girl, and she shed tears of joy as they hurried back to camp.

"Oh! then, when shall we start to escape?" she asked, gazing trustfully up into the road-agent's eyes. "I would so like to get out into the living world, once more."

"As soon as we are ready, my dear young lady, we will attempt the passage!" Floyd responded, stirring up the fire.

First, however, we need to prepare a supply of this palatable fish food, for we know not how long it will be ere we can again get food. Even when we are once out of this pit, into the mountains, danger lurks everywhere in the mountains, for the new red-skin chief, Half Moon, and his dirty Vagabonds, are roaming about, preying and offering great indignities to all small parties they chance upon. Besides, ere we leave this place, I would know the story of your life, which must be an interesting one. Be not afraid to confide in me, for I am your friend, and any advice or assistance you may need from me, will be heartily granted."

"Yes, you are very kind, but I know not if I ought to make you my confidant," Nolie replied, gazing thoughtfully into the fire. "I will, however, trusting no harm will come therefrom. It is but a short story, yet much of importance is connected with it, for me."

"My mother was, and if still living, is, an Indian woman, or rather a half-breed, between American and Sioux, fully cultured, and of fair education. When a young woman, she was the princess of her tribe, and the recipient of many valuable land and money gifts from both the settlers and the Indian agents, because of the peaceful influence she exerted among the tribes. When in her youth and beauty, a handsome, dashing cavalier came from the East, and induced her to leave her tribe and wed him, which she did. All of her property and valuable trinkets were sold, and the cash turned over to her husband, which amounted altogether to a great sum of ready money. Well, Markeesa and her pale-faced husband dwelt in Minnesota for one year, during which time one child was born, myself; then the husband ran away with Markeesa's money, and she never saw him again."

"Time rolled around, until five years ago, when my mother learned where my father was living in the East. She wrote to him, but received no answer. We then confided our trouble to Jackson Sterling, an Indian agent, better known as Red Lark, and he promised to act for us. He wrote to my father, but what the contents of his letter was, I shall never be able to tell you, for he did not tell us. But after a month he got a letter, in return, and immediately thereafter we were taken prisoners. I was taken to Big John's outlaw stronghold, at that time over on the Yellowstone. Since that time I have been kept with them, and never have seen any one I knew or could appeal to for relief. My poor mother was taken off to another dismal mountain prison, where, I have since learned, she went stark mad. That is, sir, the secret of my life."

"And a strange bit of life's reality, too, I should say," Flying Floyd remarked, thoughtfully, as she finished. "This Indian-agent traitor—what did you say was his name?"

"Red Lark—or Jackson Sterling."

"I think I have heard Deadwood Dick's men mention him as being a second-class desperado. What was your father's name, miss?"

"Cyril Waltonby. My name is Nolette Waltonby—a name given me by my poor crazed mother."

"Waltonby! Waltonby!" Flying Floyd muttered, reflectively. "Where have I heard that name? Somewhere in these Hills, and not long ago at that. I won't be positive, but I am impressed with the idea that there is a settler in the Musquekang valley, by the name of Waltonby."

"Ah! then can it be that my father has come back to the West?" the girl cried, a strange, dark flush mantling her brow. "Would to God I could find him, sir."

"And, why? You could do nothing with him, to prove yourself his child."

"Yes, I could. I have my mother's marriage certificate from the chaplain at Fort Laramie. And even if I cannot get back Markeesa's money, I can accomplish one remaining object of my life."

"What?"

"Revenge! Cyril Waltonby shall feel the hand of vengeance strike heavily upon him for the great wrong he has done."

"Yes, you have that satisfaction left, if you can effect no compromise. But, we will first see what we can do. Maybe I can be of service to you in arranging matters. We will now eat and sleep until another day, and then attempt to leave this Devil's dead-fall."

Accordingly they spent the day in rest and conversation, and, when night fell, reoccupied their hard couches by the embers.

Early the next morning they were astir, and equipping themselves with torches, and roasted fish, they set out upon their venture for escape.

On arriving at the outlet or water-tunnel, Flying Floyd took the lead, and they cautiously entered the passage, advancing step by step, and watching with sharp scrutiny the sides above and around them. The water splashed beneath their steps, and caused strange echoes to reverberate around them.

For what seemed almost an interminable space of time they kept on, all the while gradually but sensibly descending.

But, at last, after several hours, they emerged into a deep, rugged canyon, and Flying Floyd gave an ejaculation of surprise and joy.

"Cheer up, Miss Nolie, for luck is ours. I know

just which way to turn, now, to take us out of the mountains. If we had horses to ride, we could reach Deadwood Dick's stronghold in a couple of hours. By foot, in about twice that length of time."

Great was the sensation in Flood Bar! Far and wide was heralded the news that for the small sum of thirty cents, the head of Deadwood Dick could be seen—thirty cents only to view one of the greatest curiosities of the Nineteenth Century!

Jack Barronet's Telephone and Tally-Ho Stage line to Deadwood was one medium to circulate the news, and brought in double-loads of excited visitors to see the head of the notorious road-agent.

And the general verdict rendered, was that the head had once stood upon the shoulders of Deadwood Dick.

The proprietors of this novel enterprise, were two sharpers who had received their initiation into the way of making money during the early days of California's harvest, and they took great pride in presenting their prize for public inspection, although they were reticent as to how they came into possession of it.

When Old Avalanche heard the news, a grim expression came over his features.

"Don't b'lieve ef's Deadwood Dick no more'n you or I am!" he said, to Jim Belmont, the Virginian.

"Great ham-bone w'at abused ther constitoochin uv old Joner! How d'ye suppose any feller human 'd ever git his bread-mixers around ther head supporter o' Dickey? Lord, ef I war as sure o' eternal salvation as I am ther Dick's at this very moment not fur off, a hugely enjoying ther joke, I'd go an' insure my life, swaller a dorg-button, an' make work fer ther Elizer Swain."

"But, you'll find you are mistaken, when you go and view the head," said Miac, who had already visited the show. "It looks just like Deadwood Dick's fotygraff, w'at they've got stuck up onter ther canvas."

"Well, we can better tell, when we look with our own eyes," Belmont replied. "Come on, Avalanche, an' we'll take a squint at the elephant."

"Great surreptitious ham-bone, yes," the Annihilator replied, cheerily, although there was a lingering of doubt in his mind and voice—"we'll hev'er go see ther sarcuss—go ter see ther anymals, as ther pious folks allus say, when, ef ther truth war known, all ther care about is seein' ther sarcus. But, talk about sarcusses—ye jest ort'er've seen ther Annihilation, when et war all together. Royal American ham-bone! b'lieved thunder an' concentrated lightnin' warn't skeerily nowhar. Ef et warn't fer ther hard times, I'd hev a hist'ry writ uv ther great exploits o' we three—would, by gracious!"

"By this time the two men were at the "Museum," and paying their fee, they entered the crowded pavilion. As they did so, their hearing was greeted on every side with the exclamations from many a lip.

"Yes, et's a fair shake! Et's Deadwood Dick's head, sure enough."

Avalanche and Belmont pressed forward. The head was inclosed in a large glass globe, filled with brandy, and placed upon a pedestal where all could view it. It had been cut off close to the neck's connection with the shoulders, and had a very life-like appearance. The face with its clear handsome features, high forehead, and long raven hair were all too nearly like those of the dashing highwayman, for a doubt to be given that this was not the head.

"I cavel!" Old Avalanche said, turning away with tears streaming down his face. "Et's my boy, Dickey, an' no mistake."

CHAPTER X.

HARD-CHEEK, THE TRUMP CARD.

AND Avalanche, as well as the people, accepted of it as a verdict that Deadwood Dick had played his last card, and that it was his head whom the two California sharpers were exhibiting to hundreds of spectators, daily.

"I'm sorry fer you, old man," said Jim Belmont, as he led old Alva back to camp. "No doubt ye thought a heap o' ther road-agent cuss, an' all that, but I s'pect ef aire a blessing ter ther Black Hills thet he's pegged out."

"Great hifalutin' ham-bone that old Joner did hifalute! then ye ain't no pard o' ther great boreal epydemic, ef them aire yer moralistic views o' ther case. No, sir-ee! Dickey war jest the very quintessence o' human natur, electrified by a dose o' cavortin' lightnin'. Game war he as any young rooster thet ever matched spurs, an' ef ye couldn't lick a feller-mortal yerself, because yer j'int's an' hinges war gettin' old and rusty, Dickey war the lad w'at could do thet same perille little job fer ye."

"Yes, we'll admit that he was good-hearted and generous, in some ways, but he was daring, impudent and merciless in others."

"No he warn't, no sich a thing!" the old man replied, dancing up and down, indignantly. "I'll bet my old j'int, Florence Cordellar Night-in-a-gale, thet Dickey war jest as squar' a pard as vegetates thes side o' ther river Jordan—I'll bet my old he-goat ag'in' all ther govyment bonds ye kin skeer up!"

The two men sauntered back toward camp. On their way they came face to face with Carlos Cambre.

Jim Belmont had of course never seen the Spaniard to know him, but Avalanche had, and recognized him, immediately.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, pointing his sharp little eyes straight at the ex-lieutenant. "Great ham-bone w'at arthquaked ther system uv old Joner, et's that dasted garter snake, Careless Cucumber."

And the old man stopped stock-still, blocking the path. Cambre likewise stopped, seeming equally surprised at the meeting.

"Hello! you here, old rackabones?" he saluted,

with an attempt at pleasantry, although he fully could conceal his malignant hatred for the scout. "How did you happen up in this locality? I thought you were dead."

"Did ye? Great sanctified ham-bone! that's nuthin'. Gude man's tho't jest them same ijees, wi' out enny definite result. Feller once prayed fer me an' sot out ter git tools ter dig my grave wi', but I warn't dead. Another, once up in Montany, stole fifteen dollars uv an old Injun Queen jest fer ter git my obituary put inter ther condolence column uv ther *Helena Stars and Stripes*. But I warn't no more dead, then airt ther leetle insects which trail ther war-path over yer skulp. A feller just ther other day sot down onter my bread container, wi' ther intention o' rendering a verdict, but jest erbout that time, ther jury had a different ijeer o' ther case. Oh! no, Careless, ther great devastatin' eppidemic airt alive, an' as ready fer a skewrup as ever er war."

"Well, I can't say as it is any pleasure to me to know it," Cambre replied, grimly. "You know I and you never did have an over-stock of love for each other, old scurvy."

"No—leastwise, we never sucked each other's fingers, wi' ther delusion ther they war sugar-plumes, my honey-lipped galutiorious skunk!" the Annihilator said, with an ejection of tobacco-juice which, had not Cambre jumped to one side, would undoubtedly have dyed his dark countenance the color of tan-bark.

"No, geolorious Cucumber, et war neverer our lot to luv each other beyond ther friendly salute o' a pair o' knuckles, an' ef ye want any o' ther aforesaid, I'm bettin' I kin give ye a full measure."

"Pshaw! don't get belligerent, old scarecrow. I'd scorn to lay a hand upon a man of your years, when you are entering your second childhood. Don't talk of fighting at your age. I see you have just come from the show, yonder. That isn't Deadwood Dick's head!"

"Eh? it isn't? How d'ye know?"

"It makes no difference how. Why, Deadwood Dick is in this very town, I'll wager every cent I possess."

"An' wouldn't stand ther least chance o' losing at that, would ye? Doubt ef ye've got a U. S. penny in yer pockets, w'ile ye're talkin'. How about Edith Stun?"

"Oh! she's alive, and here in Deadwood, watching for Deadwood Dick."

"Bully fer her! She'll keep right on wi' her funny bizness until she gits her head cut off like Dick's. Shedd'n wonder ef ther great Annihilation might be able ter take a hand. Ther gal lost my respect fer her, by her cavortin' up at Eureka."

"She'll have Deadwood Dick's life-blood, ere the year dies, and I'll help her quaff it!" the Spaniard returned, with a savage fierceness that surprised even Avalanche, for he had never yet mistrusted that so much of fiendish evil lurked in Cambre's nature.

"Ye will, will ye? Great ham-bone w'at paralyzed ther constitoochinal system of old Joner! I'd like ter see ye, would I! Bet my interest in ther moon ther ye'd find et ther wust dose ye ever cum across. Know'd a professional blood-sucker, oncet, who sucked ther devil blood outen Injun braves, an' squaws, an' made 'em peaceable an' serene as a hoss-fly on top uv a speckled toad; yes, sir-ee, you bet! I heard o' the chap, an' give him jest ten dollars ter cum an' extract sum o' ther devil-blood outen my tongue an' pugilistic old mother-in-law. But 'twas no use. He broke his jaws ther very fust try, an' a hull Injun nation mourned his loss. No! no! don't ye try ter drink Dickey's blood, Careless Cucumber, or ye'll git a dose o' physic w'at'll go through your systematic construction wuss'n lead pills."

"Well, maybe I shall take your advice, Alva, and again, maybe I shall not. Anyhow, look out for me, should I ever get the drop upon you, for I love you just the same as ever. Adieu, old elk!"

And the Spaniard stepped to one side, passed, and stalked on toward East Flood Bar. Avalanche watched him until he reached the bridge leading across to the shore; then hurried on to inform Belmont.

A perplexed expression mantled the Annihilator's face, for he was in one of the deepest puzzles of his life. His eyes told him the exhibited head was that of Deadwood Dick, but his heart rebelled against such an idea, and here, too, was another and no less a man than Cambre, declaring that Dick still lived.

But sober thought had decided in all minds, except that of the old war-path veteran, that Deadwood Dick had at last come to the end of his adventure-some career, and that it was his head which the two California sharpers had swimming in their glass jar, in under the pavilion.

One evening Messrs. Hallowton and Miles had a new "star" upon their boards, consequently a large crowd was attracted. The star was a champion boxer, a professional, by the way, who had gained considerable fame up at Hayward City. He had there cleaned out the town, and his arrival in Flood Bar might have been assurance that he was ready to measure strength with the *ites* of that place. But as he could dare no one to box with him, he proposed another line of sport. His name was Blue Bill, and he invited the crowd outside, where from his improvised spring-board he astonished the natives by some of his remarkable feats in jumping. Once he measured a distance of thirty feet, again, thirty, and a third time, thirty-three!

"Thar ye airt, gentlemen!" cried this long, lathy individual, as he stood and gazed triumphantly around. "I ain't no bettin' man, myself, but I'll wager a gold eagle thar ain't a man in the crowd kin ekal my leap!"

"Great illustrative ham-bone, that did old Joner instruct!" ejaculated Old Avalanche, who was one of the spectators. "I wish my hinges warn't so dasted stiff and rusty, young feller, or I'd try ye a whirl!"

"Hurra! wake up. Do ary man want ter leap wi' me?" sung Blue Bill, capering back, and snapping a juggler's staff of gold eagles into the air. "Hayr I am, plain, homely, an' honest disposed, willing ter bet one gold eagle I kin beat any man in the crowd jumping from ther spring-board."

"I'll take you!" cried a voice, and a slim, spindling youth, with beardless face, pushed forward. "Put up your stakes and go ahead."

Two eagles were accordingly deposited in the hands of a bystander, and Blue Bill trotted back a score of yards from the spring-board, in order to get a good start; then he came bounding forward as swiftly as a frightened hare.

Up the spring-board—then like a meteor he shot forward through the air, mid wild shouts from the crowd, and then struck down upon a fine soft bed of sand which had been raked up purposely.

Where he struck he remained firmly rooted to the spot, and a measurement was quickly taken.

"Thirty-five feet!" cried the verdict, and the crowd cheered lustily.

The stripling looked rather grim as he heard the announcement, but did not hesitate. He meant to try his best, whether he won or lost.

With a wave of his hand to the vast audience, he ran back half the distance Blue Bill had, and then leaped ahead with determination.

On—on—up the spring-board, and then came the leap—one which caused the spectators to give a gasp of wonder.

Then the stripling struck lightly down in the sand, and the measuring man ran forward.

"Thirty-nine feet and a half!" he shouted, and then the crowd took up the cry, and the night rung loudly with acclamations of applause.

"It's a cheat! it's a lie! I'll bet a hundred dollars I can beat the spindle-shanks!" bellowed Blue Bill.

"And I'll take you!" accepted the victor, making a deposit. "Go ahead, and if you'll jump a hundred feet, I'll make a point on you. My name is Fred Feather!"

"And I'll lay you 'way behind, sure's mine's Blue Bill!" the boxer cried.

"Oh! yes, undoubtedly ye will!" commented Old Avalanche. "Lord! Great ham-bone ther censured old Joner. Ef my Prudence Cordelier war only hayr, how beautifully she ked get away wi' ther brag. Why, et's a solid-act, actooal fact ther she once jumped d'ar over herself in endeavorin' ter catch a hoss-fly w'at war buzzin' about. 'Tain't nothin', w'en ye get used to it, gentlemen."

"Which—drawing the long-bow, or jumping, old man?" questioned Miac, who had come up to see the sport.

"Either, Stubby, my ray o' sunshine. But, luk; hayr cums ther galoot like a streak o' greased votes on ther way ter meet ther Investigatin' committy."

For with a shout, Blue Bill had sprung forward like the wind, every nerve and muscle exerted for the contest. On, up the spring-board with panther-like agility—then the leap and the announcement of the distance.

"Forty feet!" cried the man of measure, amid great excitement.

Not a word said Blue Bill now, but there was an evil glitter in his eyes. He stood to one side, and watched Fred Feather come bounding forward; then, just as the youth bounded into mid-air, Blue Bill pulled a pistol from his belt and fired.

There followed a wild scream of agony, and the stripling tumbled to the ground, far short of his intended goal—dead!

The crowd stood at bay, as it were. No one moved to avenge this heartless murder. Not until Blue Bill was about to move away and then, while a murmur of indignation ran through the crowd, a young man sprung forward.

"Hold! you assassin!" he cried, confronting the villain, his eyes flashing, and his face flushed. "You are not to escape so easy!"

"Who are ye?" growled Blue Bill, partly raising his revolver. "I'll—"

"No you won't!" cried the other, quickly knocking the weapon upward. "You have got to fight in a different style, to pay for Fred Feather's life, or my name isn't Hard Cheek, nor I don't deserve my reputation for being a Trump Card!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE ROAD-RIDER'S VICTORY.—CAMBRE ACCUSES.

"THREE squeals for Hard Cheek!" roared Old Avalanche—three yooops fer the young galoot as kin lick thunder'n blazing out o' Blue Bill.

And evidently agreeing with the old man's spirit, the crowd gave a hearty hurrah, which raised a slight of reverberating echoes from the bar, where the scene was transpiring.

Blue Bill began to look a trifle dubious, as he saw the spectators form in a ring around him; he saw that he was elected to fight, and that he had an opponent by no means despicable for his muscular strength.

For this youthful avenger who had styled himself Hard Cheek, was a fellow of rather striking appearance. He was of medium height, and well built, with iron-like limbs noticeable for their swelling muscular contours, a smooth, round face, rather bronzed by the sun, yet which was capable of expressing humor or anger in a strong degree. It was a face not frequently met with, handsome, bold, manly and prepossessing. One striking feature of his appearance was, that his head was as smooth as his face, so far as hair was concerned, the application of a razor having removed the wig with which

Nature had adorned him. So that his skull was left as glossy and shining as the bald spot in an old man's head, which gave to him a rather humorous appearance.

His attire was rich and elegant, consisting of a light cassimere suit throughout, with patent-leather shoes upon his feet, and a late-styled silk hat upon his head—or rather upon the ground, now, it having been knocked off in his impetuous rush to intercept Blue Bill.

The two men stood face to face, eye to eye, stern resolution evincing on the part of Hard Cheek, and bitter hatred on the part of Blue Bill.

The former at length spoke.

"Drop your shuttin'-iron, Mr. Blue Billian!" he said, coolly and authoritatively. "We ain't a-goin' fer ter decide this funeral in thiet way. I have a good solid pair of knuckles, and you have the same, wherefore, we will use them, disclaiming the use of mechanical death. Don't git skeered, now, sweet Billian, for I haven't the least idea but you ought to be able to polish me off in the most scientific manner, you being an old hand at it. However, now's a good chance fer me ter learn, an' ef ye do bit me on ther cheek, et's harder'n a brick, an' kin stand yer racket!"

"Hurra! Great ham-bone w'at philosophized wi' old Joner! that's ther kind o' talk, me darling! make him b'lieve he ken lick ye, an' then let him be surprised w'en he gits a glimpse o' ther inaccessible banks ter Jorden," said Avalanche.

"Oh! he'll fight, never fear!" replied Hard Cheek, with a little laugh. "He dassent run, an' I'll soon fix him."

And so saying the Trump Card edged closer to the enraged boxer, with a tantalizing little laugh. He wished to, little by little, arouse Blue Bill, as the matador arouses his bull. And he succeeded admirably, for at last, with a howl of rage, the professional boxer sprung forward, his huge knotty fists doubled, and a glare of devilish hatred in his eyes.

Then commenced a battle—a hot contest with the only physical weapons God bestowed upon man; a desperate fight—for victory and vengeance.

The crowd gazed breathlessly on. They admired this intrepid youth; to see him come off victorious was their strongest wish. And from the way the battle started off, it was pretty evident that their wish would be gratified.

For Hard Cheek proved himself a master of self-defense. He planted his blows with a decision and accuracy that told, every time, and by the time thirty rounds of blows had been struck, Blue Bill's face presented an appearance more resembling a battered piece of beefsteak than a human countenance.

"Quarter!" he cried, leaping back, blood streaming out of his eyes and nostrils. "Hold on! I beg!"

But, in that same instant he had drawn a revolver, and fired, with the muzzle turned toward Hard Cheek.

But his aim had been unsteady, and a bullet through his adversary's coat-sleeve was the only result. No! not the only result, for there was, the following moment, a sharp rifle report, and Blue Bill dropped dead in his tracks, while a posse of armed horsemen dashed boldly up onto the Bar, with wild shouts.

"The road-agents! the road-agents are upon us!" cried the crowd, and instantly there was a scattering in every direction.

It was indeed a portion of Deadwood Dick's strong band, who had boldly entered Flood Bar, with Flying Floyd at their head.

And the Flood Bar-ites who had no love for outlaws, only retreated a short distance, then halted, and began to edge, cat-like, toward the enemy.

Of the road-agents there were somewhere in the neighborhood of two score, all heavily armed; of those "ites" upon the Bar, probably four times that number, but very few of them "heeled."

Near where lay the dead bodies of Blue Bill and Fred Feather, the road-agents drew rein, and standing up in his stirrups, Flying Floyd glanced over the sea of grim, bearded faces around and on every side.

"Men of Flood Bar!" he cried, "we do not come here to fight—neither do we come to despoil you or yours. We come to view what is said to be the head of our late commander, Deadwood Dick. I do not wish a disturbance, and if you create one the results be upon your own head. Forward, boys."

The word was obeyed, and in a body the band moved forward and stopped before the tent wherein the two Californians were exhibiting the head. One of these sharpers was exhorting to a crowd as the road-agents came up, and it was to him Flying Floyd spoke, in his pleasant yet firm voice.

"Sir—exhibitor of the head of Deadwood Dick, we, his followers, have come to look upon his face, which you claim to have preserved life-like and natural. You will confer a favor by bringing it out, where we can see it, and decide as to its identity."

"Reckon not, captain!" replied the Californian with a grim chuckle. "It costs thirty cents to see thiet sight. Reckon et would cost about twelve dollars a head fer ye, seen' ye airt road-agents, an' have plenty o' tin."

"We pay no license, no toll, no fee, my friend!" was Floyd's response, "and it is a certainty that we shall never pay you a cent to view the head of our late chief. Fetch it out, at once, or we'll trample your ranch so deep into the ground that it'll take you longer to excavate it than it has the ruins of Pompeii. None o' yer lip, either, or there'll be a deadascal lying where you stand, to keep company with Blue Bill, back yonder."

With a growl the Californian vanished within the tent, and Flying Floyd turned to his men.

"Might is right, in this case!" he said, with a smile, "although it will somewhat decrease these devils' receipts, I reckon."

The exhibitors were a long time a-coming, but they came at last, bearing the glass case between them in which swam the head of Deadwood Dick. A cry of indignation and sorrow went up from the lips of the road-agents—a wall of grief, as it were, for many there were in the band who had served under the Prince of the Road during his first campaign in the hills, and loved him with an undying brotherly devotion.

"Tis, indeed, the head of our chief, mates!" cried Floyd, a tear glistening in either eye—"he whom, I am sure, every one of us loved and respected. We would have fought for him alive—why should we hesitate to avenge him when he is dead? A question arises—how came his head in the possession of these two rascals? Does it not point to them as his murderers? Ay! of course it does; and they who take life shall die also, saith I, Flying Floyd. Seize them, boys!"

A dozen of the road-agents leaped from their saddles and rushed toward the two Californians, who had dropped the glass case and drawn their revolvers. And undoubtedly their capture would have been effected but for another occurrence just then.

There was a wild shout, and the whole multitude began to rush forward, firing as they came.

Flying Floyd saw in an instant that the Flood Bar-ites had opened upon them, and knew they would have no mercy upon the followers of poor Deadwood Dick.

"To your saddles!" he cried, sternly, all his blood aroused—"forward! Shoot down every mother's son that opposes you, for they opened the affray of their own free will!"

And right valiantly the road-agents responded by speeding bullets true and fast against their assailants. For five minutes there was an incessant roar of revolver shots, intermingled with dying screams; then the road-agents burst from the ring, and, leaving half their number dead and dying upon the Bar, dashed away at breakneck speed up over the bluff, and away out of sight. But if a score of their number they had left upon the battle-field, twice as many of the enemies of Deadwood Dick had fallen.

And a doubly-bitter feeling was excited against the road-agents.

Hard Cheek soon was a general favorite about Flood Bar. He was an expert *buchario*, and could manage the ugliest cayuse with the greatest ease. He was equally a good shot, card-player and miner, though he appeared to have plenty of cash, and had no need to sift golden sands for a living. With *Avalanche* he soon became famous friends, and where was one, the other might easily be found.

But that Hard Cheek had enemies, before long became apparent. His free and independent way, and "cheeky" assurance, while it amused some, angered others, and then the fact that he would not submit to bluffing or excess of tongue, generally led into a row, in which the rightly-termed Trump Card always was a "trump."

One evening a few days subsequent to the battle on the Bar, Hard Cheek was in the Inter-Ocean, watching the scenes transpiring around him, when he was accosted by an old man whom he had several times before noticed on the Bar.

An old man, with snow-white hair and beard, and a perceptible stoop in his shoulders, attired in rags, and leaning upon crutch and cane. And this was what he said:

"Good-evening, my son. Could you do an old man a favor?"

"A favor, is it?" said Hard Cheek, staring in surprise. "Well, it depends somewhat on what the favor is to be. If ye war ter ask me to put a telephone-roof over sum loafer's eye, or speak wi' my revolver phonographically inter another galoot's ear, I might, perhaps, oblige you. But, of ye war wantin' me ter vote for you for President, or ter lend ye a millyun ter b'ld an elevated railroad wi', I don't judge ye've tackled the wrong man, nor ther right, either. I'm busted, by thunder!"

"Ah! but the latter is also my case. I am sorely in need of money. I must have money!"

"Yas, I presume so, but thet don't say I'm yer bank to draw on. Who are you?"

"I am—*Carlos Cambre*, in disguise!" replied the man, in a whisper.

"Oh! you are, eh?" Hard Cheek replied, eying Mr. Cambre, speculatively. "Why the disguise?"

"Because I did not wish you to recognize me, and get the drop on me."

"Oh! you didn't? See here, ain't you off the track?"

"No! why do you ask?"

"Because it kinder 'pears ter me as how you're mistaken in ther chap ye're talkin' to. Great Caesar! Bet my life you've been drinking."

"No I haven't. Nary a drink for a week. But drunk or no drunk you are Deadwood Dick!"

"The devil, you say!"

"No, simply Deadwood Dick. I know you, for all your altered appearance. You can't make the Red Hot Harris business work any longer."

Hard Cheek calmly lit a cigar, as he gazed at the disguised Spaniard.

"Is there a mad-house, near here?" was his next thoughtful question.

"Not that I knows of; why?"

"Why, I didn't know but you had just escaped."

"Bah! Deadwood Dick, bah! don't try to stuff me, for I won't hold another mite. What I want is money, and if you give it to me, I'll let you go on your own hook; otherwise I shall introduce you to these gentlemen of Flood Bar, who love you so well."

"You don't say so?"

"Yes I do, and the next act upon your programme will be aerial suspension by the windpipe."

"Well, now you do hit me precisely," Hard Cheek said, with enthusiasm. "I never tried hanging yet, and would really like to take a trial. Supposin' you just go over and whisper to some of them gentlemen, that I am anxious to swing from the most convenient tree, at once!"

Cambre swore the most horrible Spanish oath upon his list. The cool, provoking nonchalance of this shaved-headed youth was beyond comparison.

"But, the money?" he reminded. "You have lots, and must divide, or I will betray you, as sure's my name is Cambre."

"Go 'long and do it then; I'm waiting with all patience for you to do it," Hard Cheek laughed, mockingly.

For a few moments the ex-lieutenant hesitated. He was wondering, if, as the Trump Card had said, he were not off the track. No! he would not have it so, and raising his voice he shouted:

"Help! Help! Deadwood Dick!"

CHAPTER XII.

DEADWOOD DICK'S SUCCESSOR.

AMONG the improvements which were being added to the Flood Bar, was a printing-press, which turned out a dirty little six by ten sheet, containing the news of the Bar, and such other information as could be gleaned from the Deadwood papers, which were brought in on the stages. This *Miner's Progress* considered itself an enterprise of much importance; had its staff of reporters, who furnished "accurate and vivid" descriptions of every street-fight, brawl, or wholesale slaughter, and having a large sale at twenty-five cents apiece, it managed to exist as a newspaper.

On the morning of the day, in the evening of which Hard Cheek encountered Carlos Cambre at the Inter-Ocean, the *Miner's Progress* contained the following item:

ROAD-AGENCY. A new star is said to have dawned upon the horizon, to replace notorious Deadwood Dick, whose head still continues to attract attention at the museum. This time it is a woman who is said to have one time been Deadwood Dick's wife, although they have not been living together for some time past. This female robber is beautiful, refined, and well educated, but a very devil-act of recklessness. She is at the head of Dick's old band, and swears to spare no pains to reap a harvest of vengeance upon her enemies, of whom she has a number. So ye enemies of Deadwood Dick, look out lest ye be stung by this female serpent of the Black Hills."

The cries of Carlos Cambre through the Inter-Ocean saloon, of course created considerable excitement, for almost anywhere in the Black Hills, the name of Deadwood Dick was an omen of ill to come. The crowd quickly approached; all games were for the time suspended, and a murmur of wonder and excitement ran riot generally.

"Where is he?—where is Deadwood Dick, you galoot?" shouted Joe Hallowton, one of the proprietors, as he elbowed his way forward. "Show me the road-agent cuss."

"Deadwood Dick's dead, long ago!" shouted the crowd.

"Got his head cut off mit his neck!"

"Died from a cut in his throat!"

"Got his head on exhibition, over yere in ther museum."

"Too thin! Dick's speerit aire roamin' wi' angel Gabriel, long ago."

And a dozen other exclamations of a corresponding nature.

"Whar is this man?" repeated Hallowton, drawing a revolver which carried a fifty cartridge. "I want ter see him an' play Fourth o' July wi' his royal ribs."

"Here! here he is!" shouted back Carlos Cambre, pointing accusingly toward Hard Cheek.

"There's your man, wi' his hirsute possessions shaved off, and his handle changed to Hard Cheek. Thar's your huckleberry, an' I'll bet my ducats the man's Deadwood Dick."

"Oh! yes, without doubt!" Hard Cheek assented, with a grim little laugh and a grimace.

"That galoot Deadwood Dick?" said Hallowton, as, backed by his crowd, he paused in front of the youth and surveyed him critically from head to foot.

"That galoot ther road-agent cuss? Oh, no! that ain't he, my friend, an' I'll bet my shanty on't."

"No! that ain't no Deadwood Dick, no more an I!" cried a great, lumbering miner, fresh in from Deadwood City, "nary a bit of it. Reckon I know that same Dick, fer he owes me a couple o' hundred, which he cheekily borrowed at different times w'en he tolled the stage."

"I say it is Ed Harris, and I'm positive of it!" Cambre protested, "and I command you, citizens, who have the power, to arrest this man and deliver him up to the proper authorities. I stand the charge."

"Ho! ho! Reckon we ain't stickin' our fingers inter unobtrusive pic, just for your sake, Mr. Cambre!" Hallowton replied, scornfully. "Ef ye want ter take ther chap, go ahead an' take him, fer I won't help ye, you bet yer life."

"Nor I!" "Nor I!" chimed in the crowd. "Hard Cheek ain't Deadwood Dick no more'n old Sittin' Bull aire Presyden't Hayes!"

"Great bam-bone, no!" put in Old *Avalanche*, just at this moment coming up. "Deadwood Dick aire up on the shores o' Jordan, pannin' out golden wings fer ther use o' angels. Just got a phonographic telegram from him. Hey, Cheeky, my fragrant poppy, war they tryin' ter make ye out a cavortin', buckin' road-riders?"

"Well, yes, it kinder looks so!" the Trump Card replied, with a smile. "Shouldn't wonder if they'd succeeded, ef their argyment hed cum from any one but this galoot," with a wry glance at Cambre, who, seeing that defeat was his, had turned, and was stalking away.

And from thence on Hard Cheek was a citizen among citizens, and all thoughts of his being Deadwood Dick were dissipated. Cambre, however, hung like a shadow upon his trail, and could not be shaken off. Evil was there in the Spaniard's heart, which needs must be let out.

He was living at the big hotel upon the eastern bank, and Edith Stone, the girl-fiend who was his evil-genius, lived with him. She rarely ever came forth, and when she did it was only to take a morning gallop for the benefit of her health, which was rapidly declining.

The night of Cambre's defeat, he returned to their suit of rooms, in a very ugly temper.

Edith was evidently waiting for him, for she glided forward from a dark corner—a wild, unearthly gleam in her dusky eyes. She had grown strangely pale and thin, and less pretty than in the days when Dick had met her up in the Black Hills.

"Well?" she demanded, confronting Cambre, fiercely—"what news do you bring, this time?"

"Good, in some respects—bad in others!" he replied, seating himself. "I have found Deadwood Dick. As I told you I have suspected—he is the Hard Cheek, who is becoming so popular here."

"Ha! then he *is* alive!" she hissed, a wild, half-demonic expression upon her countenance.

"Yes, he is alive, and so is Leone Harris. She is at the head of Deadwood Dick's band."

"How do you know?"

"I read it in the paper."

"And does Deadwood Dick know that she is leading his band?"

"I cannot say as to that, for the news only came out in this morning's paper. Besides, I have no positive proof that this Hard Cheek *is* Deadwood Dick, and if he is not, Dick is undoubtedly dead, and that was his head the Californians had upon exhibition. I accused Hard Cheek of being Dick, and called down the crowd upon him, to-night, but they cleared him by a unanimous decision that he was not Deadwood Dick. So, as the matter rests, it is hard to decide whether he is our enemy or not."

"Oh! that the hour of my vengeance would come!" the girl hissed, as she paced up and down the room, like an enraged tigress. "Ah! Deadwood Dick, you devil, the day *will* come when it shall be in my power to rend your hard heart as you have rent mine."

"Yes, there is at least one chance left for vengeance, even if Dick is not alive. Through his wife we can strike him a blow. So take comfort, and while we are waiting for our opportunity to nab Leone, we will also keep a vigilant eye upon the movements of Hard Cheek."

The retreat of Deadwood Dick's men was in a little valley-pocket, some twelve miles north-west of Flood Bar. In the pocket which had but one means of access, through a narrow gap or natural fissure, the outlaw-hunters had built them a village, consisting of perhaps a score of cabin dwellings, a general store-house, and a jail or strong-cabin, which had been constructed especially for the accommodation of prisoners.

This was the main rendezvous of the whole of Deadwood Dick's Road-agent and Regulator band, which now comprised nearly a hundred members, each an advocate of death to ruffianism. This great force was divided into five divisions of twenty each, and all but Lieutenant Floyd's command was scattered in other parts of the Hills, where they carried out the declaration of war against outlaws, according to Deadwood Dick's will. Each member wore a silver badge on which was engraved the words—

"DEADWOOD DICK'S EAGLES."

In the village, we will now go, to see what is occurring there, one day later.

Some of the Eagles were lounging lazily in front of their cabins; others were strolling about, perhaps accompanied by a female, for a large per cent. of the men were married, and had families.

In front of one of the prettiest cabins, two women were sitting upon camp-stools, bathed in the fresh morning sunshine, and talking as they sewed upon some light dress fabric.

One of them we have often met before, and by her supple form, her beautiful face, and her shining eyes, we might recognize her as Leone Harris, the wife of Deadwood Dick, had we not her wealth of brick-red hair for further proof and identification.

Yes, it was indeed Leone, still looking fresh and girlish, despite the trouble she had passed through; Leone whom last we met under those distressing circumstances, (in No. 49) which robbed her of her infant son, and separated her from her husband, whom every one now believed to be dead. And very sad and grief-stricken was the little woman, now, at times; then, at others, she would grow fierce and resentful, and long to strike a blow for every drop of Deadwood Dick's blood.

Flying Floyd it was who had found her roaming alone in the mountains, and recognized her by a previous description Deadwood Dick had enthusiastically given of her. He had brought her home to the village, and in the absence of Dick, the men had heartily acknowledged her as their chief and queen.

The companion Dick had rescued from Big John's ruffian band—Nolie Waltonby—the only legitimate child of the Musqueang valley herder and farmer. Since their escape from the Devil's pit, Floyd had never found it convenient to take her to her father, for the lieutenant was really in love with the dusky beauty,

and he knew that the case was not urgent. And it was she who was speaking.

"I must prevail upon Mr. Floyd to take me to my father's home, so that I may see him whom old Markeesa taught me to hate. If I can induce him to give me back the stolen wealth which rightfully belongs to me, I will then return here and stay as long as you will permit me."

"Which will be as long as you choose to stay, sweet sister," Leone replied. "For your company is a comfort to me. None of the other women are so near to my nature as you, and I shall ever wish to have you near me. But, I fear that will not be long, for if my eyes are not telling me wrong, there is another who soon will claim a larger share in your love than I shall dare to hope for; and there the lucky one comes, now," she added, pointing up toward the gap, from which a horseman was just entering the pocket.

It was Flying Floyd, and the soft flush that crept into Nolie's dusky cheek, betrayed that an interest had been awakened in her heart for the handsome, dashing lieutenant.

"Mr. Floyd has never said anything more than commonplaces, to me," she replied, conscious that her heart was beating with delicious little throbs.

"No, perhaps not; but his eyes speak where his lips are love-paralyzed. Oh! I know all about it, Nolie. He will propose, ere long, and if you think you can love him, such as he is, you had better accept, for he is a good, true man. I took poor Dick as he was, a hunted outcast, and I don't think I shall ever regret it. For though they tell me he is dead, I shall never cease to love his memory."

By this time Flying Floyd had ridden up and dismounted.

"Back, my lady," he cried, gayly, doffing his sombrero to Leone, and then to Nolie. "Have I not been speedy?"

"Yes, lieutenant; in fact, you never seem to take away your time. How are things in Flood Bar?"

"Lively, and growing more so each day. I think in time this section of the hills is destined to lay Deadwood and Custer in the shade."

"Indeed? Did you hear anything concerning Divisions Three, Four, Five, and Six?"

"Yes. They are all working well, and the people are just beginning to realize their worth. Last week Division Four captured the whole of Outlaw Tom's gang, and delivered them up into the keeping of the military at Reno. And I see the affair was credited, by the Deadwood *Pioneer*, as one of the good deeds of Deadwood Dick's men."

"Ah! that is good. What prospects are there of your getting at Big John and his gang?"

"Oh! we shall fetch them by and by. I have entrusted the matter to my sub-aid's keeping."

"Did you find out anything concerning the errand upon which I sent you?" Leone asked, gazing thoughtfully away.

"Yes, my lady. Carlos Cambre and the woman, Edith Stone, are both in Flood Bar, and that they mean to strike at your life upon the first opportunity. I am certain."

"Probably, if they know where I am."

"Oh! they do, for the *Progress* has announced that you are with us."

"Well, we can consider that pair included as ruffians, and I give it as my order that you hang them up, the very first time you meet them. If I meet them, I shall shoot them as I would an offending wolf—for what else are they than human wolves? Did you learn anything of Hawk Harrington?"

"No more than that he is in Flood Bar—waiting for you also, without doubt."

"Yes, and for him I have a bullet laid up. Poor Nora! she, who was a prisoner with me, under Hawk Harrington's power! I wonder whether or not she is alive!"

"Probably alive, but hiding. Now, Miss Nolie if you are ready, and I think you are, I will order another horse, and we will ride down into the Muskegang valley and interview this rascally parent of yours. I think I can talk turkey to him!"

CHAPTER XIII.

BURNED TREASURE.—HOSTILITIES AGAINST HARRINGTON.

MR. WALTONBY, the Muskegang valley farmer, and his daughter were returning to their home through the gloaming of the night following the lieutenant's return from Flood Bar to Deadwood Dick's village. They had been to an intermediate stage station, a few miles to the eastward of their residence, where business had kept the farmer until late. But, mounted upon swift, reliable steeds, they had no fears but they could reach their home in safety.

The road or trail lay through the bottom of the valley, which was matted by a dense growth of young trees, and consequently it grew dark within this forest, ere it was really dark outside upon the clear land.

"Go lang, Sula!" chirped the farmer, as he urged along his horse. "I don't like to be out late of nights, any more, for my recent illness and the fact of Deadwood Dick's robbers being around, makes me nervous."

"But, papa, you do not think they are here in our valley, do you?" questioned Ida, in alarm.

"There is no telling where they may not be, daughter," was the reply. "Because of our pretty home, they may suspect that they could realize a large haul of money by raiding us."

"Oh! dear, to think of those awful men, makes me shudder."

Cyril Waltonby suddenly drew rein.

"What is it, father?" Ida asked, anxiously.

"Nothing, child, except that I wish you to ride on home, alone. It is but half a mile yet, and it will not take long for you to accomplish that distance on the back of your noble steed."

"But what will you do, papa?"

"Oh! I am going to see Joel Garner concerning cutting some timbers for me, and as this is much the nearest route to his house, I will start from here. Tell your dear mother I will be home in a couple of hours, without fail."

"Won't you let me go with you, papa? I should enjoy the ride so much."

"No, not to-night, Ida," the farmer replied, and smiling a good-by, he spurred his horse into the branch-path, and was soon hidden from view by the bushes.

When out of sight he slackened the speed of his horse to a walk, and as he rode slowly along, fell into a fit of musing.

"I don't think the child suspected me of an untruth, as sharp as she is," he muttered, glancing sharply around and listening. "No, there she goes, now, homeward bound, so I need have no fear of detection. Get up, Cherry, for I am anxious to learn if my treasure is still resting intact."

And so saying he again spurred on into a gallop, riding with a grace and ease not often observed in men past the middle age.

For perhaps half an hour he kept on through the dark woodland, his steady seeming to know well the night-enshrouded path; then the farmer drew rein, and dismounted at the foot of a pine-tree, which stood a few rods away from the trail. First glancing cautiously around to see that no one was immediately near, he pulled away a great mass of leaves which the wind had evidently drifted against the tree's base, and reaching down into a hole among the gnarled roots, he pulled out a safe of tin, which was locked with a tiny padlock.

"Thank heaven the money is all intact!" he muttered, hefting the safe. "My dream was fortunately a lie. I don't know how I came to dream of Markeesa, for she is far away—unless—unless Red Lark has let her escape as he intimated in his words to my daughter. Yes, the money is here—all of Markeesa's wealth, which she intrusted to me after our marriage."

Fitting a small key into the lock, he raised the lid, and glanced in to see that all was satisfactory. Apparently it was, for he unlocked the primitive treasure, replaced it in the hole, then covered the leaves carefully over.

"There!" he muttered: "It can now remain there until I die, when my will will disclose its hiding-place to my wife and daughter, Ida. Now I will return home, lest suspicion be created by my absence."

Night at Flood Bar, with an air most stifling in its heat, even though it be yet but May, a spring-time month. All the population are lying around loose, out of doors, fanning and drinking, and drinking and fanning.

Old Avalanche and Hard Cheek were sitting upon the balcony of the Inter-Ocean, watching the crowd upon the single street below, and across on the Bar, where cosy frame structures were fast replacing the canvas abodes.

Squirrel Creek had been obstructed by a mighty dam, just above the Bar, which backed a level lake of water far back into the dark narrow canyon, where the chief mining interest and attention were turned. Upon this lake or pond, the soaring reddish moon threw a strange soft radiance, and dwelt with fine effect upon the picturesque landscape, and scene below.

Avalanche and the shaved-headed Trump Card were calmly enjoying their cigars, and listening to the strains of music diffused by a San Francisco German band, now and then exchanging a few remarks.

But something occurred, presently, which revived their interest in animate things.

A man came strolling through the veranda, and descended the stairs to the street below. Instantly Squirrel Sam, who had also been sitting upon the balcony, arose and glided softly after.

"Thar!" quoth Avalanche, with a screwing up of his mouth—"I told ye. Thet 'ere Squarl Samuel he's got a secret, an' I knowed it, an' thar fust chap, w'ich aise Hawk Harrington, aise concerned in et. Just place yer right foot before yer left, Hard Cheek, and pedestrianize along w' yer uncle ef ye've got any desire to precipitate yerself ag'in' an 'arthquake o' fun, fer fun aise thar in this arid atmosphere, you bet! Mebbe we won't be uv any use, and mebbe ag'in, we kin put in a little work fer Sammy."

"Mebbe better you let ther galoot fut his own stockin's!" suggested Hard Cheek, speculatively. "But, I'll go, an' we'll hear ther musick ef we don't make er cent."

Accordingly the two eccentrics arose, and started down the stairs in the wake of Squirrel Sam, who was by this time hurrying up the street, closely dogging the footsteps of Hawk Harrington, the San Luis valley herder.

What the mute miner wanted with the herder was the question which puzzled the minds of both Hard Cheek and the Annihilator, and bound were they to keep on until they acquired the solution.

Hawk Harrington was presently seen to enter a newly-erected cabin at the upper end of the town, and Squirrel Sam was seen to take refuge behind a clump of trees, with the evident intention of watching the cabin. But he came forth, as the Annihilator and Hard Cheek approached, a hard look upon his handsome features.

"Hello! aise thet you, Sam!" Avalanche saluted good-naturedly. "What's up w' yer ducks? Hain't turned road-agent, hev you?"

The miner shook his head, with a smile, and then, for the first time that he had ever been heard, in Flood Bar, he spoke:

"No, not exactly playing road-agent, my friends,

but keeping watch of that devil in man's disguise, who just entered yonder cabin."

"You mean Hawk Harrington, eh?"

"I do, most decidedly—the man butcher, outlaw, thief, and kidnapper. Perhaps you have wondered, since I have been among you, why I remained literally mute. I may as well tell you that it was because of a vow I had sworn—a vow of vengeance against that man—never to speak until I had killed him. The vow I have broken, but I shall kill him all the same."

"An' ef ye want any help, ye're's a part o' ther great Annihilation left, w'at kin lend ye a fluke in ther most liberal manner, fer I owe that same pilgrim a score, in ther settin' up o' Deadwood Dick's debts of gratitude ter his enemies. But what are ye down on Hawk Harrington about, Squarl?"

"Because he brought desolation upon me and mine!" Sam replied, a dark shadow coming over his countenance. "If you care to hear, I can soon inform you of my hatred for the accursed wretch and you will say that my hate is not without a cause."

"A short time ago I was a happy man in my snug little home down near Virginia City, Nevada. I had a wife and two pretty children, aged three and one; also, my home was made happier by the presence of my sister, a beautiful girl of eighteen. Thus, with a liberal mining income, I had things pretty much to my liking."

"But one day, when I was absent, my home was raided, my money stolen, my wife and children massacred and scalped, and my sister carried off into captivity. I returned to behold the fearful sight; then I swore before God never to rest until I had killed each and every one concerned in the tragedy. It was a part of my oath never to speak to mortal man or woman until my vow was fulfilled. And never have I until this moment."

"By investigation I found that the chief marauders were Bannock Indians, and that this Hawk Harrington was their temporary leader, for, having seen my sister, he had resolved to possess her, and got the reds to assist him. The Indians I killed and scalped ere I came here, and now I want Hawk Harrington, to complete the list. That he has my sister in yonder cabin, or somewhere close at hand, I am almost certain. She was in that Black Cabin, I have since learned, and escaped with another girl, on the night of the fire. But I believe he has recaptured her."

"Great ham-bone, w'at enlarged ther swallerin' capacity uv old Joner! Then that cuss is just sp'illin' fur a hang. Are ye with us in ther celebration o' our festivities, Cheeky?"

"That I am!" Hard Cheek replied, with enthusiasm.

"Then come along—foward—march!"

And, swinging his hat, the Annihilator led the way toward the cabin, followed by Sam and the Trump Card.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TRUMP CARD'S GREAT SHOT.

It was but a matter of a few rods to the cabin which Hawk Harrington had entered, a few moments before.

Straight up to the door of the cabin the three men marched, never thinking for a moment that the concealed ruffian-herder might shoot them down as they came.

It was a good solid whack that Old Avalanche gave the door, and then he and his companions listened intently.

"What's wanted?" was demanded by gruff tones from the inside. "Who's the devil be ye?"

"Who? Great uproariously-demented ham-bone w'at kicked up a row in ther stummock uv staid old Joner! Is et possibul ye don't recognize us? Just come out hayr, Mister Hawksum Harrington, fer we want ter interview ye on 'portant bizness relating ter trade an' commerce. Mebbe we'll make ye a present of a big bonanza, or p'raps we'll give ye a seat in the House on ther floor!"

"Get out, or I'll put an ounce ball through ye!"

"Oh! pshaw! ye wouldn't do sech an inhuman act as that, would ye, beloved Hawk? Ye wouldn't go back on yer relatives, would ye? Kin out and deliver an address. Thet's all we want o' ye, beloved Hawker o' female beauty—jest ter speechify ter us, w'ether ef aise ter be silver or greenbacks—w'ether et ar' ter be sittin' Bull or old Grant, next term!"

"There was no response from the inside, but from sounds of things slamming about, it became evident to the three men that the San Luis valley herder was literally "getting up on his ear."

"Oh! he's b'ilin'!" observed Hard Cheek, with an appreciative grin.

"But won't git cooked till we snatch him bald-headed!" grunted the great Annihilator, with a grim laugh. "Cum! cum! aise ye ever goin' ter appear before us, your artistic son-of-a-polar bear—you pin-feathered goslin'!"

The answer came in a rather sudden if not unexpected way. A bullet from an unseen source whistled so close to Avalanche's ear, or where had once been his ear, as to cut away a lock of hair that the old scout had trained down to hide his loss.

"Whew! that was a class one!" mildly remarked Hard Cheek, glancing around. "Cum frum inside, I reck."

"Yes, that's ther percise location from w'ither cumeth thet bullet. Hawk Harrington has opened his batteries onter us. Class slave, too, but nothin' like sum w'at this old disease o' destruction hes bin through. Once I war so nigh ter heaven that I hed really got ther shore o' ther eternal river. But ther ferry-boat had busted her boiler an' war laid up fer repairs, so I got tired o' waitin' an' kin back ter dwell among ye—solid, actual fact, by gracious. Oh! yes, that war a sassy bullet, my beloved dew-

drop, but not a dastard sarcasm as ter them ther Great Annihilator has dispatched as messengers o' foreign glory. Once molded a bullet thet went clean thru' sixteen Injuns, an' afterwards served ter fill ther gums uv an old maid up in Yankton, Dakoty. Et war made o' gold, ye see!"

"It is advisable for us to git out of this, and not make a target for the ruffian's bullets!" said Squirrel Sam, as soon as the irrepressible Annihilator would let him drop in a word. "He probably has loopholes in the walls, and could defend himself against a dozen, instead of two or three."

"Then what are we to do, in such a case?" demanded Hard Cheek.

"I don't know just yet. We'll retreat under cover and consider."

"Hold on! don't giv up yet! Mebbe ther galoot will wunter accept. Alre ye thare, beloved Hawk!"

An angry growl was the only response from the inside, and that growl human and savage.

"Oh! yes, I see ye're thar," continued the scout. "Spose ye ain't made up yer mind ter cum out an' let us heer from ye on ther great political an' financial question?"

"No! git out, curse you, or I'll send another bullet squar in'er ye!"

"Great ham-bone thet enraged Joner! 'tain't no use—"

He paused a moment; then in a whisper added: "Sh! I've struck an tjeer! Don't speak loud, on-least ye she'd tellen et away—Cum back o' ther house, an' I'll fight ye."

Accordingly the three men crept around to the back side of the house, where there was but little space between the logs and mountain walls of cold grey rock.

Darkness had increased into night by this time, and the great moon was beaming all its mellow splendor down over an earth's whole landscape.

"What's yer plan?" Hard Cheek demanded, when they were quartered behind the rude dwelling. "Out with it."

"You bet! never know'd ther Annihilation ter keep an tjeer ontill some one else hed conceived et, did ye? Great automatical ham-bone thet distressed old Joner, no! my tjeer's ter smoke him out!"

"Smoke him out?"

"Yas, thet's ther sentence I phonogracically spake—smoke him out, jest ther same as ye would a koon out uv a tree, or an old skulemarn out o' ther stule'us. I've bin thar, boyees, when I war a leetle shaver, knee-years old. Used ter smoke out ev'ry skulemarn reg'lar once a month. So git redder w' yer shootin'-irons, an' I'll show ye how ther great human ferret bounces her game."

Following the Annihilator's directions, Squirrel Sam and Hard Cheek hurried away to the nearest stable for straw, while Avalanche watched the cabin. They soon returned with fine hay, which was still better for their purpose.

By the smoke escaping from the chimney, it was evident that a large fire was burning within the cabin, which all the more favored the purpose of our friends.

Seizing a bundle of hay in one arm, Avalanche allowed Hard Cheek and Squirrel Sam to boost him up to the roof of the cabin. And while he was stuffing the hay into the chimney, he made a discovery which caused him to send up a yell of rage, as he leaped off from the roof to the ground.

While he had been ascending to the roof, Hawk Harrington had softly stolen out of the front door, and was bounding down toward the dam of Squirrel Creek.

"He's gone! Great everlasting ham-bone thet kaffumixed Joner! he's gone! An' he kerries a big bundle in his arms, w'ich looks like a female!" shouted Avalanche, as he reached ground, a distance of twelve feet.

"Give me a rifle and I'll wing him!" cried Hard Cheek, eagerly. "Bet my dirty shirt I kin knock him so stiff he'll never as much as wiggle onc't."

"Not no! you shall not shoot!" Squirrel Sam replied, quickly. "It would be risking yonder maiden's life, and she is my sister. Come, our legs are as strong as his, and we can soon chase him down."

"Ay! ay! hayr we go like a great roarin' cavortin' thunder-storm o' demolition—a veritable hurricanader o' terrificosity an' subversion—a purely Norweijan snow-flake o' cantankerous retribution!" shouted the old veteran, as he nimbly led the way in pursuit of the flying ranchero of the San Luis valley.

On—on with the speed of a prairie deer, the burly herder bounded, sure-footed and yet reckless, as he made his great flying leaps; and on—on followed his three foes, at the top of their speed.

Harrington was a swift and easy runner, and it soon became evident that he would not be run down so readily as one might suppose.

From the cabin to the dam, the distance was something over two hundred yards, and sloping downward, which was equally in favor of pursuer and pursued.

On reaching the bank of the dam, nothing would be left the fugitive but to plunge into the water, or stop and fight back.

At least, so thought Avalanche, but he was doomed to disappointment. On reaching the shore, Hawk Harrington gave a yell of defiance; then was seen to leap into a skiff, and pull rapidly out over the calm moonlit waters of the dam, into the shadows of the canyon walls.

A groan escaped Squirrel Sam, and something suspiciously like a curse found expression from the lips of old Avalanche, at the provoking defeat which stared at them.

Hard Cheek fortunately, was the coolest one of the three. He neither seemed excited nor angered. He stopped upon the shore of the dam, and drew a

revolver from the leg of his knee-boot, where he habitually carried his weapons. He cocked it, and then glanced searchingly out over the waters, which shimmered like gold in the brilliant moonlight.

Hawk Harrington was pulling desperately toward shelter in the canyon; he had Squirrel Sam's sister between him and the pursuers; in three minutes more he would be out of the reach of bullets.

Hard Cheek, took this all in at a glance, and hesitated. Avalanche and Squirrel Sam were watching him eagerly, intently—hoping almost against hope.

Both were expert shots, but neither would have for a moment dared the attempt of picking off a man who covered nearly the whole of his person with a human shield, and that shield, the very one they were trying to save.

"Quick, or it will be too late!" Squirrel Sam gasped, excitedly. Somehow he put faith in the unerring aim of this young sport.

"Yas, go on, fer ther sake o' ther great ham-bone thet delivered from peril old Joner!" assented Avalanche, craning his neck forward, his fingers working nervously, as if he would like the opportunity of putting in his leaden mark, also.

"You'll take the risks, eh?" Hard Cheek interrogated, still watching the departing skiff, with the gaze of a lynx. "It's a mighty uncertain thing w'ether I'll kill the one or two o' 'em."

"Go on!" Squirrel Sam replied, a dark, vengeful expression flitting upon his countenance. "Better both should die now, than yonder hell-hound should live. Fire!"

Hard Cheek needed no second invitation; he evidently had no love for this Del Norte man, though he made no expression of actual enmity in words. He raised his revolver—a shining, gold-mounted affair of the Derringer pattern—and glanced along the tube, between the sights. All he could see of the person of Hawk Harrington was the ruffian's arms as they worked desperately at the paddles, and a patch of his skull to one side of the maiden's neck, and just back of his left ear. Otherwise he was effectually screened.

Hard Cheek seemed scarcely to take aim, ere he pulled trigger. A tiny flash, a sharp, ringing report, that echoed and re-echoed between the canyon walls.

He had fired upon the very eve of the skiff's disappearance between the walls, where the gloom was dense, and nothing of the result of the venture could be learned for some time.

There was no answer—neither a death-yell nor a shout of defiance.

But, by and by, the three men gave a great shout of joy, as they beheld the skiff drifting back into the dam, with a slight girlish figure standing upright in it, waving the slouch sombrero of the herder, who lay dead over the stern.

The shot of Hard Cheek had been a most remarkable one, and turning as he beheld the result, Avalanche gazed long and earnestly at the young sport.

But, whatever he thought he did not just then express in words, for the skiff touched shore, and Squirrel Sam sprung forward and caught his sister in his arms with a yell of delight, which even a Comanche vocalist might have been proud of.

CHAPTER XV.

WHICH IS A CHAPTER OF EVENTS.

It was a gladsome reunion, that of Squirrel Sam and his sister Nora, but it would have been a far happier one, had the miner's wife and child been alive to have participated in it. But they were dead, and it was but meager satisfaction to Squirrel Sam that Hawk Harrington lay dead at his feet as an offering of vengeance to his slaughtered ones.

The bullet, examination proved, had penetrated to the brain through the skull just back of the left ear, and as soon as the first greetings with his sister were over Squirrel Sam turned and thanked Hard Cheek very heartily for saving a life so precious to him; while he and Avalanche declared the shot to be one of the most remarkable they had ever seen.

"Great ham-bone that eulogized old Joner!" the old veteran observed, enthusiasm beaming from his wrinkled countenance. "thet were shuttin' you jest bet yer Amerikan birthright! Neyer see'd but one cuss as ked do as well, an' thet war Deadwood Dick, in his shuttin' fer ther Big Bonanza mine, up in 'Reka. It alre an actooal fact thet he put twenty-four lead pills ag'in' one spot on ther bull's-eye and rung the bell ev'ry time. Then thar war Bufler Benjamin, he war a good shot, but I reckon, Cheeky, thet ye and Dick stand at ther head of yer class."

"And you must allow me to thank you, also," said Nora, La Grange, putting forth her soft little hand.

"Had it not been for your opportune shot, I should in all probability, have been subjected to one of the most horrible fates that this dead ruffian could have conceived. Thank God, I have ever been able to hold my own, since he captured me, brought me with another lady into the mountains, and shut us up into the cabin, which later was borne hither on the flood."

"This other lady—who was she?" Sam asked.

"She was Deadwood Dick's wife, and so sweet a little woman, that she often was a great comfort to me," Nora replied. "We were shut up in a room together, with a mad Indian woman in the room beside us and liberty. Thus we were unable to escape, until we fought our way out on the night of the fire. Leone escaped, I guess—at least, we got separated, and I was recaptured by a couple of Hawk Harrington's tools."

"Well, I thank God that that devil in human shape is dead," said Squirrel Sam, candidly, "for it takes a great load off of my mind that my vow of vengeance is complete. What shall we do with the worthless corpse?"

"Chuck et in ther dam, an' let ther fishes nibble at it!" advised Avalanche.

"Nary!" put in Hard Cheek, peremptorily. "I'm jest about uv ther opinion that thet 'ar corpse belongs ter a feller about my size, who swings around ther circle under ther name of Hard Cheek, the original Trump Card."

"How so?" demanded Squirrel Sam, in some surprise. "I'll admit that you shot the cuss, but is that any saying that his corpse is yours?"

"I reckon ther defunct herder aire mine!" was the calm response. "I'll leave it ter Avalanche, ef ye like."

"Very well. If Avalanche says you are to be possessor of the body, I have no objection," the miner replied, with some curiosity.

Avalanche and the sport accordingly stepped to one side, and the latter whispered a few words, which were inaudible save to the old man.

"Et's all right," the Annihilator nodded, as he returned, his countenance bearing a surprised expression, while Hard Cheek had kept on down the street into town. "Ye mought as well leave ther karkuss layin' whar et is, fer I reckon ther boy's entitled ter et about as much as any one."

"Very well; then he shall have it," Squirrel Sam replied, without question. "Let us go back into town."

Which they accordingly did, on the way meeting Jim Belmont and Minco, who, upon learning the miner's story of his past wrongs, congratulated him warmly.

After they were all back in Mico's tent, enjoying a venison feast in commemoration of Miss Nora's rescue, Squirrel Sam drew old Avalanche to one side.

"This Hard Cheek, scout—is he not the notorious Deadwood Dick?" was the miner's interrogation.

"What? Hard Cheek my poor Deadwood Dickey, who got his head amputated? Guess not, Mr. Squar'l. I don't reckon you're on the right track."

"Then who is Hard Cheek?"

"Can't tell ye, pard, fer it's ag'in' all ther principles taught me in my category. So ax me no questions and I'll tell ye no lies."

And this was the sum total that could be squeezed from the old veteran of the Indian war-path.

What he knew concerning the young sport of the mines, he was evidently determined to keep locked within his own breast.

In the meantime, Hard Cheek, after having left the party at the dam, had tramped back toward town, his head bowed as if he was in deepest thought. But no words on his part expressed these thoughts, whatever they were.

On reaching that part of the shore street, where the business was mostly concentrated, he was about entering the Inter-Ocean, when he was tapped on the shoulder by a small boy, and an unsealed note was slipped into his hand.

"You be Mr. Hard Cheek, ain't you?" the boy asked.

"Yas, I reckon so. Where did you get this?" the Trump Card demanded, in some curiosity.

"Oh! a lady give me a three bits ter fetch it," was the reply.

"What kind of a lady, boy?"

"A red-headed lady, sir, as purty as a purty picture."

"Ah!" Hard Cheek smiled at the boy's earnestness. "Are you sure such a lady gave you this, boy?"

"You bet I am," was the response, after which the lad skurried away.

Stepping inside the Inter-Ocean, Hard Cheek opened the missive, and hastily perused its contents, a smile in the meantime breaking out about his lips. It read:

"FLOOD BAR, May 6.

"Mr. HARD CHEEK—I have penetrated your disguises, and know you to be Deadwood Dick, my husband. Come to me at the edge of the woods beyond the bluffs, to-night, for I want to see you once more. I am now at the head of your band, and your work of war against outlawry is steadily going on. Come, I beg, for I am eager to see you once more, on earth, for we know not what moment one or the other of us may be stricken down. Come as soon as you get this."

LEONE.

This was all, yet it seemed to have much weight with the young sport, for he gazed at it long and thoughtfully, reading and re-reading it.

"She says she has penetrated my disguise," he muttered, thrusting the note into his pocket and going out into the open air. "I wonder how she came to guess my identity. I believed no one had any knowledge of my secret except Avalanche, and not he until to-night, though he may have been suspicious. I will go and meet her; God ever bless her."

He looked first to the condition of his weapons, then hastened to the only livery-stable in the town, and hired a horse. So that in ten minutes he was leaving the town behind him, and riding over the rugged bluffs to the eastward.

His grace in the saddle was that same old reckless ease of Deadwood Dick's, even though his face was changed beyond recognition by the loss of his mustache and hair.

The moon was still throwing her ghostly flood of whitish light over the earth, as the horseman approached the deep, dark forest, at the edge of which he expected to find his wife—his Leone, whom he still loved as when first they wedded.

"Poor girl!" he muttered, as his thoughts glanced back over the past, which had been such a thing of horror—"she has had it hard enough, since she linked her fate with mine. Never have we been at rest, in peace and security, because of my reckless life and the bitter enemies I have made. But thank God, my men now are fighting bravely for me

and in the defense of justice, and some day I hope to be pronounced a free man."

Dick, as he galloped fearlessly up to the edge of the dark, frowning forest had little suspicion of foul play. He had not a thought that he might have been misled. His wife had called him—that was enough.

But as he approached the designated spot, there was a whirl, and a lasso settled and drew taut about his arms and waist, and he was a prisoner.

The next instant, he was jerked bodily out of the saddle, and struck upon the ground with a force that momentarily stunned him.

When he recovered he found himself securely bound, hand and foot, so tightly that it pained him to move a muscle.

And, bending over him, with devilish triumph expressed in their faces, were the two whom he knew to be his inveterate enemies—Carlos Cambre and Edith Stone.

"Ha! ha!" the ex-lieutenant laughed, demoniacally, "so we have got you, have we, Deadwood Dick—got you right where we must needs use you. Do you recognize us?"

"Yes, as two devils in human shape, Sir Spaniard!" Hard Cheek replied, angrily. "You are both possessed of such angelic purity, that I marvel I did not see through you ere I came."

"Ha! ha! 'twas rather a clever ruse to entrap you, sure enough. We really didn't expect you, for we gave you credit for more sense than to believe you would willingly come and deliver yourself right into our power."

Deadwood Dick bit his lip in vexation, that he should have, indeed, been so easily duped. Could he have had a moment's warning of danger, he felt positive he could have avoided capture.

"And do you know what your capture means, Ned Harris?" asked Edith Stone, fiercely.

"No, young woman, I have not the slightest idea of what it does mean," was the reply.

"Then, you vile wretch, know that it means death to you—hell on earth, while there is aught left of your body to burn at the stake. Look at me, man—do I look as if I would hesitate to torture you? Do I tremble, as though I had some obnoxious job before me? No! 'twill be a panacea to my aching heart to see you burn all up into a crisp! It will be glorious satisfaction, to appease my appetite for vengeance on you. Oh! my hour of triumph has come, Dick—come, as I swore it should. You spurned the honest affection and broke the heart of one who worshiped you. Then I swore to have your life, and that of your accursed red-haired wife. She will follow you."

"Yes, Mr. Deadwood Dick, it is morally certain that you have got to die, and we have prepared for your death by burning you at the stake—Indian fashion, you know!" Cambre put in, with a smile of triumph. "Suppose we won't have the divine pleasure of hearing you beg, eh?"

"No, I don't think you will," Hard Cheek replied, with a chuckle. "I ain't one of the begging kind, I guess you'll find, if you search back to find my pedigree. Besides, death and I know each other too well to get frightened at our respective shadows!"

"You do, eh? Well, you'll perhaps have a chance to get better acquainted, then. You acknowledge yourself to be Deadwood Dick?"

"Yes, if you are any better pleased by the acknowledgment. I am willing you should call me Deadwood Dick, Buffalo Bill, or Texas Jack—anything to please you."

Edith Stone and Cambre withdrew after a few moments, and appeared to be holding an animated conversation.

He lay in the moonlight and watched them narrowly, wondering if they really meant to carry into execution their threat of burning him at the stake.

He had little doubt now but that it was in their evil natures to do it, but whether they would or not was just then a problem he could not solve.

Cambre he saw presently begin to gather leaves and dry twigs about the base of a young iron-wood sapling, which he concluded was to be his death-stake.

And he had assurance of it when Edith Stone approached and spoke.

"Deadwood Dick, I have come to give you one chance more for life. Wed me and take me East to live, and we will omit this burning-at-the-stake business, and ever live happily together. Which shall it be—will you accept me or, what you will find ten times more unendurable—a horrible death?"

"Death—a thousand times death, in preference to linking myself with you! Go ahead—you'll find I am not afraid to die!"

Without a word the female fiend turned away and assisted Cambre to gather more leaves.

When enough were collected, Deadwood Dick was lifted bodily and bound to the stake, so tightly that the blood could barely circulate through his veins.

Then the leaves and inflammable material were heaped around him, and, with a fiendish laugh, Carlos Cambre lit the fire in several places.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE GOLD OF MARKEESA.—A SCENE ENDING IN A TRAGEDY.

At about the same hour, something interesting was going on in the Musquekang valley, at the home of the Waltonbys. The night being warm and breathless, the family were sitting upon the veranda of their handsome home, the two ladies engaged at some delicate needle-work, which the full light of the moon allowed them to execute, while Cyril Waltonby sat close at hand, smoking his briarwood pipe.

He was nervous, habitually, perhaps, for he constantly glanced around him, as if he expected a blow from some unseen foe.

"Hark! who is coming down the valley, for I hear the sound of hoof-strokes?" said Mrs. Waltonby, a little, matronly-looking woman, as she stopped in her work. "I wonder who can be abroad to-night."

"It is Deadwood Dick's road-agents, maybe!" suggested Ida, in alarm. "Papa said that they were somewhere in this part of the hills."

"No! 'tis not the road-agents," said Cyril Waltonby, gazing up the moonlit valley road, where four mounted persons had just come into view. "There are but three men and a woman, and agents never venture out in such small numbers. It is possibly some wayfarers, who have set out for Deadwood in the cool of the night."

The quartette of riders came on down the road at a dashing gallop, but halted and dismounted upon the lawn before the Waltonby mansion.

Two of these night-riders were Flying Floyd, and Nollie Waltonby—the others merely a protective body-guard which the lieutenant had brought along. They remained in the back-ground, while, with Nollie upon his arm, Floyd advanced to the veranda, and tipped his hat to the ladies, after which he bowed coolly to the farmer.

"If we mistake not, we stand before Cyril Waltonby, do we not?" the lieutenant asked, eying the farmer with an undimmed gaze.

"Yes—I am Cyril Waltonby, sir. Of what service can I be to you?"

"Of considerable, if you play a fair game, now, where heretofore you have played a dishonest one. Do you recollect this young lady, sir?"

"I do not. I don't think I ever saw her before, sir."

"Yes, you saw her when she was but a babe in her mother's arms, for, Cyril Waltonby, she is Markeesa's child, and your *only* legal daughter."

Had a bomb exploded then and there, no more astonishment could have been depicted, than at this strange declaration of the lieutenant.

"My child!" cried the farmer, leaping to his feet, in evident astonishment—"my daughter! Impossible, sir; there is some mistake."

"There is no mistake, Cyril Waltonby—no mistake, at all!" Nollie cried, stepping forward. "As Mr. Floyd has said, I am the daughter of old Markeesa, your only legitimately wedded wife. Do not try to deny me, for 'tis useless. Even as your minion, Red Lark, let Markeesa escape, so did he, by lack of vigilant watchers, let me escape too, and I am here to claim my own. I have proofs—certificates of your first marriage, and of my birth."

"Papa! papa! is this true—can it be true that I am—and Ida Waltonby burst into tears and wept in concert with her poor horrified mother.

"Oh! yes, it must be ever so, for the ruffian who called himself Red Lark, was here, and told me to tell you that 'the cat's' leaped the gate and the dog has chased her into the woods, where she is hiding. Oh! papa! papa!"

And the poor young thing wept as if her heart would break.

"It is all a lie—a damnable plot to ruin me and mine!" cried the farmer, furiously. "Get you gone, you accursed impostors, or I will shoot you dead in your tracks."

"You will do nothing of the kind," replied Flying Floyd, decisively. "My men already have you covered, and it needs but a word from me to send you into eternity. I don't want to harm you, however, unless you refuse to give this young lady her rights. Then I shall string you up to one of these trees, as you deserve hanging more than any one I know of."

"Curse on you!" Cyril Waltonby hissed, biting his lips until they bled. "What do you want?"

"I'll tell you what I want," replied dusky Nollie, in her clear, ringing voice. "I want the heavy sum of gold which you stole away from Markeesa, my mother—every cent of which was hers, individually. I want this, and then I will never again molest you, nor your family, here."

"I have not the gold; I won't give it to you!" "Then you shall hang to yonder tree!"

"What! you wouldn't hang your own father, girl?"

"As quickly as I would a horse-thief, when that father is such a wretch as you!" Nollie replied. "You are a wretch, unworthy of any compassion—a thorough scoundrel and the associate of scoundrels. Why try to deceive me, who know you so well?"

"But I haven't the money!"

"Where is it, then?"

"Perhaps a rope around his neck might jostle his memory!" suggested Floyd.

"Bah! don't think you can scare me!" exclaimed Waltonby, with a sneer. "I am not to be frightened. Hang me, if you like, but you'll not find the hiding-place of the gold."

"No! we won't hang you," Floyd replied, triumphantly. "We'll take you to a cave in the mountains, and starve the life out of you."

"And not get the gold, either!"

"Well, we can try the plan, at least. Once and for all—will you yield?"

"No! a thousand times, no!" the infuriated farmer cried. "It is buried where even the devil himself cannot find it!"

"But a devil has found it!" cried a voice, shrill and high-pitched, and at the same moment a wild-eyed, haggard Indian woman emerged from the bushes that fringed the lawn, and stood revealed in the bright moonlight. "Here, Cyril Waltonby, a devil has found the gold, and here it is!"

And, with a horrible, fiendish laugh, she held aloft the tin box in which was the treasure that had been buried under the roots of the big pine tree!

A wild, grotesque squaw was this woman, with matted hair and tattered garb, and the fires of insanity burning in her eyes. And as he gazed at her, Cyril Waltonby turned alternately livid and white,

while from his lips came the one word—"Markeesa!"

"Yes, it is Markeesa!" replied the maniac wife—"Markeesa, who hates you worse than the red-man hates snakes. She saw you the other night, and you had not been gone an hour ere she had the gold. Here, my child, the gold is yours. Markeesa has no further use for it, for she is going to meet her people in the happy hunting-grounds."

Hurling the box to the ground at Nollie's feet, the frantic squaw quickly drew a pistol, and, before she could be prevented, sent a bullet crashing through Cyril Waltonby's brain. Then, pressing the muzzle to her own temple, she fired, and fell a corpse upon the greensward.

Thus had Markeesa avenged her wrongs in death.

CHAPTER XVII.

A FEMINE DUEL—AND CONCLUSION.

As the fire began to blaze up, brighter and brighter, and to grow hotter and hotter, Deadwood Dick realized that he was in a fix, in dead earnest—that nothing short of a miracle could save him.

"Come! you had better get to praying, if you want to see your soul ascend in a cloud of smoke than ther hot place above!" sarcastically suggested Cambre. "You're bound to fry and sizzle, and by an' by you'll make delightful music for us ter dance by!"

"Will I? Bet a nugget my orchestra won't diffuse a single squawk!" Hard Cheek (Deadwood Dick) replied.

"Humph! You'll change your tune, in the sweet by and by."

"Will you marry me or die the horrible death that is staring you in the face?" demanded Edith Stone, as she watched the crackling fire.

"I would die fifty such deaths, rather than marry you!" Dick replied, with a heroic firmness. "Death has no terrors to me, compared with a life with one like you."

"Then—"

She did not finish the sentence, for at this moment the crack of a rifle broke the stillness, and Carlos Cambre, with a cry of mortal anguish, fell to the ground.

"I'm killed! I'm killed!" he groaned, as Edith Stone ran and knelt by his side. "Some one has shot me. Ha! there they come—look out!"

With his last gasp of life, the dying villain pointed beyond the stake, where two riders were just dashing out of the timber—one Leone Harris, the wife of Deadwood Dick, and the other, a road-agent whom she had brought along for a guard.

As she saw them, Edith Stone uttered a fierce cry, and stood upright, with a revolver clenched in her hand.

Leone was upon the spot in a moment, to confront her enemy, while Chateau, the guard, quickly released Hard Cheek from his bonds and tore him out of the fire.

"Stand, you fiend!" cried the wife of Deadwood Dick, hurling a long, narrow sword at the feet of Edith, and retaining a similar one in her own hand. "Pick up your sword and stand on your guard, for it shall be your life or mine!"

"Yes, mine or yours!" replied the desperate girl, seizing the hilt of the blade in her grasp. "We are bitter enemies, Leone Harris, and either you or I must die—and it will be you, for I am an expert swordswoman, trained by my father."

"And if I cannot master you, I am willing to die!" Leone replied, firmly. "You and I cannot live in the same country, and, if I kill you, I am sure that God will forgive me, because I am ridding the earth of a very wicked woman."

With blazing eyes, and lips compressed, and with swords firmly clenched, the two girls—for they were yet but girls—attacked each other with a furious zest.

Their play was quick and their strokes powerful, the ringing of the tempered blades making echoes in the depths of the forest.

It was a strange, exciting combat between two infuriated women—wild in the extreme as viewed under the powerful rays of the mid-summer night's moon.

Deadwood Dick or Hard Cheek, and the guard, Chateau, stood at one side and looked on without interference, for Dick reposed confidence in Leone's skill to at least save herself from dangerous injury.

Parry and thrust and feint and lunge, but neither gained a point, until at last Leone got in a blow upon her adversary's left arm. Edith followed with a blow at Leone's neck, which was dexterously dodged and parried, and then came the culminating thrust, which ended the battle, and, with a piercing scream, Edith fell back, with the blade run through her heart—dead!

"Dead!" pronounced Chateau, coming forward, and bending over the stricken girl. "The man, here—her companion, is also dead. My rifle-bullet laid him out in style."

"Dead?" echoed Leone—"dead? Then some of the wrongs of Deadwood Dick are avenged, but I have yet to hunt down his murderers, before my mission is fulfilled."

"No need for that, my angel-on-earth," said Hard Cheek, stepping forward, and clasping Leone in his arms. "for Deadwood Dick is here!"

"What! You—you Dick—my Dick!" the wife exclaimed, shrinking back, in astonishment. "No! no! it is impossible—it cannot be!"

"It is, nevertheless, I in flesh and bones," was Dick's laughing assurance.

"But, I thought you dead—that it was your head they had on exhibition in Flood Bar," persisted Leone, between tears and laughs of joy. "I have mourned your loss, oh! so bitterly, my dear, dear husband!"

"You darling, I do not doubt it, and I ought to be ashamed of myself for so long deceiving you and the public. The head was one the sharpest had taken somewhere, because of its resemblance to me. Unfortunately—for the men—I greatly resemble many Western men, and this leads to mistakes. You remember how Gerald Hawk, your brother, suffered lynch-law because of this resemblance. This last case may have been similar. It struck me at the time of this head's first appearance in Flood Bar, to let people believe me dead, and so I adopted the role of Hard Cheek, which enable me to be about among my fellow-men with more safety. I was searching for you, until the report came that you were with my band. Since then I have been watching Hawk Harrington, and only to-night I sent his spirit flying to the master who owns it—the Devil. Thus, with his death and the death of Cambre and Edith Stone, perish, I believe, the worst of our personal foes. The public we still have as an enemy—"

"And I reckon enemies are after us now, captain!" spoke Chastreau, excitedly, pointing across the moonlit bluffs, to where a horseman was approaching at furious speed.

"Yes, something has gone wrong!" Dick replied, going to his horse which was standing near, but he quickly exclaimed: "By heaven! the man is Old Avalanche!"

"And what means his coming?" demanded Leone, anxiously. "How did he know that we were here?"

"That we must leave to him to tell. Get to your horses, for it may be something so important that it will be necessary for us to light out, immediately."

They accordingly mounted, and ranged alongside, leaving the bodies of Cambre and Edith Stone lying where they had fallen, for there was no time to bury them now.

Avalanche soon came furiously up, and jerked his high-spirited *cayuse* back upon its haunches. The animal was white with foam, and a wild steely glitter shone in the veteran's eyes—a grim expression elongated his grotesque little countenance.

"What is the matter?" Deadwood Dick demanded, anxiously. "Why do you come in such haste?"

"Matter?" gasped the Annihilator—"haste? Great antiquated ham-bone that bucked ther larynx uv old Joner's godfather! Why, ain't ye heard ther news? I supposed ye'd sild off on account o' it."

"I do not understand you. You speak in riddles. What do you mean?" Dick replied, in greatest wonderment. "Are you crazy or drunk?"

"Neither, Dickey, b'ye. But ther ain't no time fer superfluous palaver, as I uster tell old Florence Night-in-a-gale, when she'd git ter oratin' ter a hull million or two of Injuns. Strike spurs and light fer yer stronghold, fer a thousan' heeled outlaws callin' 'emselves 'Turks,' aire after ye. They've consollydated, an' got it inter ther infarnal noddles that ye be Hard Cheek, an' Hard Cheek be you, wharfore they've rid inter Flood Bar—an' thar they come, as sure's thar uster be electricity in ther hoofs uv old Prudence Cordelliar, my mare."

As he ceased speaking, the old scout pointed out toward the moonlit bluffs, beyond which nestled the infant city of Flood Bar—but a good, healthy infant, after all, was the lively little mining strike.

A band of perhaps a hundred horsemen were just coming into view. Deadwood Dick watched them for a moment.

All were rough, desperate-looking wretches of the blood and butcher-knife order, and in their lead was Old Roxby, the Deadwood Regulator!

They evidently had struck a fresh trail, for they were coming on at top speed, shouting and cursing, rendering the night hideous with their infernal cries.

"What d'ye opine, Dickey, my rosbud?" demanded Avalanche, watching the expression of the ex-road-chief's face, as its handsome outlines were revealed in the moonlight.

"Well, I think it is high time for us to be getting out!" Dick replied, with one of his old-time reckless laughs. "Come! follow me! We can soon lose ourselves in this timber, and let the man-hunters pass. Then we will away to my stronghold, which I fancy is pretty securely hidden from ordinary routes of travel."

"Yas, we'll foller, you bet yer life," the Annihilator replied. "Great ham-bone that humiliated old Joner! Never see'd a feller I'd ruther foller than ye, Dick, my Posey. Once knew'd a gal in Yankton, howsomever, who war so 'andsome that ther power uv her beauty 'd make ye trot right along behind as docile as a lamb. Her name war Mehetable Swiggle-swister, and she claimed to be a hundred and third cuzzin ter Abraham Lincoln."

Dick perceived that the Turks, as Avalanche had call'd them, had evidently not discovered the whereabouts of their prey; accordingly, he led the way into the timber, and galloped fearlessly down the forest aisles, which were lit by zigzag streaks of moonlight, Leone and Chastreau following in single file, and Avalanche bringing up the rear.

Being familiar with the "lay-out" of the timber, Dick in a short time had safely eluded the Regulators, and then they all started for the village of the road-agents.

On the way, Leone related all through which she had passed since the night of death down at Del Norte. When she had been left lying upon the river shore, with a fiery death staring her in the face, and old Avalanche did not return (as related in No. 49), she had rolled into the water and floated downstream, her clothing keeping her up. Later, she had been captured by Hawk Harrington, whose prisoner she had been ever since until the burning of the Black Cabin upon the bar, when, bewildered and nearly demented with her long captivity, she had fled into the mountains, and, later, found protection in Deadwood Dick's own village.

Arrived at Deadwood Dick's village, they found all quiet and serene.

Lieutenant Floyd had returned with Nollie Waltonby, from the visit to the Musqueang valley farmhouse, where the dusky beauty had regained Markessa's stolen wealth.

And it was but a natural consequence, that after all the perils and adventures they had passed through, Nollie should give her heart, hand and fortune to the handsome lieutenant, who plead long and earnestly for a place in her affection.

So there was a rousing wedding at Deadwood Dick's village, and Miaco was brought over from Flood Bar with his old fiddle to furnish the music for dancing. Jim Belmont and Squirrel Sam and his sister were also present, and a joyous event was the celebration of the nuptials.

There were girls from the Bar, and ex-road-agents without number, and stoga boots and delicate pink slippers united in the Cotillion, the Lancers, the good old Virginia Reel and the "break down."

There is little more to add to make this story complete.

It turned out that the Turks were not after Deadwood Dick at all, but in quest of a band of mountain horse-thieves. So that no more molestation has been offered the Trump Card of our narrative, in his secluded valley home, where he resides with his wife, and surrounded by men who have sworn to serve under his flag until the end.

It was in one of Dick's explanatory moods that he admitted the identity of himself with Elijah Swain, the Historian and Coroner. Truly, Deadwood Dick has in the past been a man of many faces and many disguises!

Floyd yet remains with Deadwood Dick, a stanch brother and lieutenant, and in his married existence may he find unalloyed happiness!

Squirrel Sam and his sister, soon after the wedding, left for the Colorado mines.

And not seldom do Dick and Leone, reunited in a happy home, receive visits from their warm old friend and advocate—Old Avalanche, the Annihilator.

THE END.

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